

SPIRITUAL VIRILITY



JULIUS EVOLA

Spiritual Virility

Collected Works

by
JULIUS EVOLA

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from "**The Elements of Racial Education**"

Inner Meaning of Race

If we have thus provided a brief summary of what race has come to mean in the most modern research, we still have not moved beyond the most abstract definitions, as we must in order to state what 'race' must mean, today, for the individual, and, therefore, what 'racial consciousness' must mean. However, this is the decisive point, for which it is necessary to refer to direct experience.

Castes and Races

From antiquity onwards ordinary language has spoken of thoroughbred men. In general, this was an aristocratic concept. From the mass of common and mediocre beings stand out 'thoroughbred men' as superior, 'noble' beings. Such a nobility, however – it is useful to remember this – did not necessarily have a heraldic meaning: types of the countryside or of any straightforward and sane people could give that impression of 'race' in the same way as worthy representatives of a true aristocracy. There is a reason to this: just as in the nobility some inner traditions have protected the purity of blood, so also, special favourable conditions in the countryside and in nature, in sane customs and in sane occupations, have been able to produce the same effect also in other parts of any given people besides the nobility.

Not only the word 'race', but also the word 'blood', have had in ordinary language a living and precise meaning, far from any biological and scientific reference. One may say 'good blood does not lie', or speak of an 'instinct of the blood'. There are insults which are bloody. There are conditions against which 'the blood itself' rebels. What does all this mean? In the depths of each human being, far beyond the area of abstract concepts, of discursive reasoning, or of conventions derived from social life, there are instincts with a determined form, there is the capacity for direct and absolute reactions, which are normal in the 'thoroughbred' man but which manifest themselves only sporadically in the common man, in the borderline cases, in the most serious tests in life.

Are we speaking here about impulses which belong to pure animal and biological life? It would be unwise to affirm this. The forces in question, the instincts of the 'thoroughbred man', far from being appendices to the animal instincts, often refute them and impose on existence a higher norm, making natural and spontaneous both the obedience to a certain 'line' and a certain style of mastery, of inner tension, of assertion.

The reactions of race have in common with animal instincts only the character of immediacy and precision: they do not derive from reasoning and intellectual consideration, but are on the contrary spontaneous and manifest the whole of a being.

Indeed, they override the intellect, since they manifest themselves in special, direct, forms of sensitivity, of judgment, of acknowledgment. Man is led by race, by blood, to evidences which are unquestionable; which, on their own plane, are as direct as those which are provided by sane

and normal senses. Just as no one questions why the red colour is red, so, equally natural and precise evidences are peculiar to the ‘thoroughbred’ man, whereas the ‘modern’ intellectualised and degenerated man gropes his way forward, so to speak, seeking to remedy the lost faculty of seeing with that of a touching with the help of the discursive intellect, often with the result that he goes from one crisis to another or that he adopts mere conformist criteria.

It is on this plane that race must be understood and lived. Race lives in blood, or rather deeper than in blood, in a depth where individual life communicates with a life more than individual, not to be understood, however, in a naturalistic way, as ‘life of the species’, but as an order in which spiritual forces are at work.

This the Ancients knew well in their veneration of the Lares, the Penates, the archetypal heroes, the ‘demon’ of a gens, entities which conceal the whole mystery of blood and the mystical forces of race.

Science can highlight the importance of race, through the results attained by genetics and the theories of heredity, demography, and pathology. All this can contribute to the awakening of the feeling of race, but it cannot create it. The feeling of race is an inner reaction for the occurrence of which, a ‘myth’ – myth as ‘idea-force’, as driving idea – is more helpful than scientific considerations. What this myth is we have indicated: race means superiority, fullness and self-confidence of life.

There are common beings and there are ‘thoroughbred’ beings.

Whichever social class they are from, such beings form an aristocracy. A remote and mysterious centuries-long heritage still lives in them.

This is why racism has the value of a test, of a reagent, even in its most general formulations. The reactions of this or that person towards the racist idea are a sort of barometer which show us the ‘quantity’ of race which is found in the person in question. To say yes or no to racism is not merely to differ intellectually, it is not something subjective and arbitrary.

The one who says yes to racism is the one in whom race still lives: the one who has been internally defeated by the anti-race and in whom the original forces have been stifled by ethnic waste, by processes of cross-breeding and degeneration, or by a bourgeois, weak, and intellectualistic style of life which has lost for generations any contact with anything which is really originary, opposes it and searches in all directions for alibis in order to justify his aversion and discredit racism.

This point must be made most emphatically, almost as a premise to any particular racist exposition. Fascism calls out today to all those in whom this feeling of race has not yet been entirely extinguished.

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Consequences of the Feeling of Race

Count de Gobineau who, from a certain point of view, can be considered as the father of modern racism, does not make a mystery out of the inner origin of his doctrine; what made him write his famous Essay on the inequality of human races in 1853 was a deep reaction against the ‘democratic and egalitarian marsh’ into which the European nations were and are sinking deeper and deeper.

Exactly this pathos must always accompany the development of any coherent racist attitude and must produce definite effects when the time comes to deduce from it political and social consequences. Such deductions, moreover, must dovetail perfectly with the cornerstones of fascist ideology, which turn out to be developed and, so to speak, energised by them.

To be racist, in fact, means to align ourselves against the demo Masonic myth, according to which the supreme value is ‘humanity’ in the singular, and within which all beings must become essentially equal and fraternal with one another. In reality, this mythic ‘humanity’ assumed by the gospel of the ‘immortal principles’ either does not exist at all, or it is of less than no significance to us, representing, not a plus, but a minus.

In order to clarify the racist standpoint, we would say that we certainly do not think of questioning the existence of common aspects in the vast majority of human beings: however, the aspects in which difference is obvious and unquestionable are equally real. We must take a stand when we decide the relative importance of the former and the latter, and here, once again, we have a test of our inner vocations.

Racism, we can say with certainty, aligns itself with the classical spirit. What was peculiar to the classical spirit was the exaltation of everything which has form, face, and individuation, as opposed to what is formless, vague, and undifferentiated. The classical, and, let us add, ‘Aryan’ ideal is that of the cosmos, that is to say, that of an ensemble of well individuated natures and substances, organically and hierarchically connected in a whole: it is not the more or less romantic or pantheistic ideal of chaos as the principle which, in its undifferentiation, dominates everything which has form.

Pursuing this idea further, on our own plane, we may say that the ideal ‘humanity’ of the demo-Masonic myth appears to us only as common denominator or as a vague substratum, whereas what interests us is only the living, concrete, well defined forms in which it articulates itself. These forms are precisely the races, to be understood as unities either of language, of instinct, or of spirit. The racist, therefore, acknowledges difference and wants difference. To be different, to be oneself, is not an evil, but a good.

When does the famous ‘humanity’ really exist? When, from a well articulated world, we go back to a chaotic, collectivist, promiscuous, world, thinkable only as the final and dreadful station of a process of disintegration and of social and spiritual levelling.

It is only then, that, if there is still any difference in the bodies, this difference can be considered as accidental, unessential, insignificant, negligible. Here is what is hidden behind the egalitarian myth and the democratic-Masonic ideology.

In the racist vision of life, on the contrary, any difference – even corporeal – is symbolic: the inside manifests itself in the outside, what is external is symbol, sign and symptom of something internal. Such are the fundamental principles of a complete racism.

And, from our Roman and Fascist point of view, it is very important to insist on the aforementioned classical tendency of racism: will to form, aversion for the promiscuous; reassumption of the principles of our ancient wisdom, that is: know yourself and be yourself. Fidelity to one's own nature, that is to say, to one's own blood and one's own race. Here is the inner, ethical and spiritual counterpart to the elements which genetics, the science of heredity, and biology give us towards the formulation of a scientific racism. Here are precise instructions for racial education.

Meaning of Racial Prophylaxis

In Germany, as is well known, measures to prevent the transmission of hereditary degeneracy were adopted some time ago, on the basis of the results of the theory of heredity as applied to race, racial hygiene, and demography. There is no need to examine and discuss such measures in more depth here. Let us just point out that, although the limit of validity of the laws of heredity in many cases, according to us, cannot be absolutely fixed, the idea of simple probability should suffice to impose on any man provided with an ethical consciousness a very precise line of action and a brake on what can be dictated by blind instinct or by mere feeling. Even in such cases, an innate feeling of responsibility and nobility imposes itself upon the impulses of natural life, manifests itself and makes itself felt in anyone who possesses real breeding.

The same thing can naturally be said regarding cross-breeding with lower, non-European, races, and it is well known that one of the circumstances which favoured the racist position in Italy was the necessity to avert cross-breeding in our new colonial empire. But, here again, what should be decisive in any case in which anyone, because of the arbitrariness of his individual will and his passivity toward the impulses and feelings of his body, favours a contamination of race, is an inner motion combined with a clear consciousness of his utter treachery towards his own blood and his ancestors and his crime in regard to his descendants. Here, naturally, we do not presuppose racial purity in an absolute sense: on the contrary, if the general type is already a mixed one, its defence against cross-breeding and any similar contaminating mix is all the more necessary, because a mixed type needs to be protected even carefully, not having 'dominant' characteristics to the same extent as a pure type, which, in special circumstances of which we shall speak below, can sometimes overwhelm and organize under its own dominance, without suffering any alteration, relatively heterogeneous racial elements introduced into the stock through cross-breeding.

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Defence against cross-breeding and the isolation of elements in which race is already affected are therefore the main aspects of prophylactic racism and are the object of the measures of what is called 'racial hygiene', which has obvious and close relations with general demography. Our racism, however, goes beyond this, and proposes to promote an action which is not only negative, or defensive, but also positive, that is to say, an action of strengthening and inner selection. In this context, of course, we cannot think, as in the previous one, of literal legislation: the fundamental task is on the contrary the formation of an instinct, the honing of a sensitivity. Here arises the delicate question of conjugal choice even among persons belonging to one and the same people. As far as selection is concerned, this is the only area in which we can move from theory to practice and act positively, so that the race of the future generations of our nation, and therefore the nation as such, gradually cleanses itself, rises, comes nearer and nearer to the type of the superior core, or 'super-race', present in a people.

The Danger of Counter-Selection

To proceed in this direction, we need not only a general racist consciousness, but also a very precise racial ideal: not merely a theoretical one, but rather an object of experienced and sincere aspiration, which should spread through the greater proportion of all the components of a people. To reach that stage, methodical, patient educative work, which, naturally, must be applied to the young first and foremost, and must use any means able to lead to the goal, is necessary.

We must examine models of the past and cultivate a special literature. We are aware of the suggestive power which, for instance, a certain type of American cinema has exerted on the masses by imparting the character of popular international 'idols' to some types of actors and actresses, who, however, are not always in order from a racial point of view. In similar way, we should endeavour to bring to life within the people a certain human ideal corresponding to that of the higher race which is found in it. And if, on top of the exerted suggestion by this type, there can be a racial consciousness and that feeling of inner dignity and responsibility of which we have repeatedly spoken, the essential premises for the inner selection and the strengthening of the race of the nation will be present.

As regards conjugal choices, that of the woman by the man is naturally essential, not only because, in practice, the initiative of the choice is taken mainly by the man, but also from the point of view of precise racial laws. According to the ancient Aryan teachings about race, in a cross-breeding, the masculine heredity would basically have the 'dominant' character, the feminine one, on the contrary, the 'recessive' one. Two important laws come from this:

1. in the products of cross-breeding of a man of inferior race with a woman of superior race, the superior race of the woman is stifled or contaminated;
2. in the products of cross-breeding of a man of superior race with a woman of inferior race, the inferior race of the woman can on the contrary be rectified and practically neutralized.

As far as the problem we are interested in here is concerned, we are considering only relative superiority and inferiority – basically, we are dealing with races which are not really heterogeneous but are co-present in a single, unitary, European people. Both laws have the inner, spiritual, aspects of which we spoke in our other books on race: from their general statement, we can see, therefore, the importance which they have in the problems of conjugal choice and racial selection. A new sensitivity, a new instinct, the suggestion of a well determined racial picture should thus gradually ‘organize’ the unions, not in the sense of ‘rationalising’ them as in a zootechnical state establishment, but in the sense that they would be more and more conscious that what determines them is no longer only a blind fact of feeling or of desire or a given economic, utilitarian, or conformist circumstance, but that inclinations and interests peculiar to the man who, in a higher sense, is ‘well-bred’ and ‘has breeding’, have at least as much importance.

Thus, racism must clarify and explain the true meaning of demography and, in particular, that of the so-called ‘demographic campaign’, while recalling, on the basis of the laws of heredity, the possibility of ‘counter-selection’ or ‘mis-selection’. What we mean is that, in demography, we cannot limit ourselves to the purely quantitative criterion of giving birth to as many children as possible, but we must also consider quality, that is, we must ask what sort of children this prolific nation will have. The mere simple and indiscriminate multiplication of the number without any knowledge of the state of the racial whole of a nation can favour an invasion of the elements determined by the inferior race, if, through various circumstances they are more prolific. This is precisely the phenomenon of ‘mis-selection’, acutely studied by Vacher de Lapouge; the result is a fall of the racial level of the nation. Such a peril, which, in a whole series of civilisations, has appeared and proved fatal for the political organisms cultivated by various units of the ruling Aryan race, can be averted if we dedicate ourselves to this racial education of the sensitivity and inclinations of which we have just spoken, to the point where our efforts come to exert a precise and positive action on the conjugal choices and, in general, on the human unions within a given nation.

Spirit and Race

We have said that, in the total conception of fascist racism, race is not limited to the mere biological entity. The human being is not only ‘body’, but also soul and spirit. However, scientific anthropology until I now has either been based on a materialist conception of the human being or, even though it has acknowledged the reality of immaterial principles and forces in man, it has posed the racial problem only within the framework of the body.

As regards the relations between race, body and spirit, clear ideas are not always found in many forms of contemporary racism, either, and dangerous deviations can sometimes even be noticed, from which, naturally, our adversaries hasten to derive the greatest benefit. For us, therefore, it is advisable to come down strongly against this racism which considers any spiritual faculty and

any human value to be a mere effect of race biologically understood, thus producing a mortifying deduction of what is superior from what is inferior, more or less in the same spirit as Darwinism and Jewish psychoanalysis. But, at the same time, we must take a stand against those who take advantage of the point of view of a racism which is limited to anthropological, genetic and biological problems, in order to maintain that race certainly exists, but that it has nothing to do with the typically spiritual and cultural problems, values and activities of man.

Our point of view will go beyond both positions if we claim that race exists both in the body and in the spirit. Race is a profound force which manifests itself both within the corporeal frame (race of the body) and within the animic-spiritual frame (inner race, race of the spirit). There is racial purity in a full sense when these two manifestations correspond, that is to say when the race of the body is consonant with the race of the spirit or inner race, so that the former can be used by the latter as the most adequate organ of expression.

The revolutionary aspect of this point of view must be remarked upon at once. The assertion that a race of the soul and of the spirit exist contradicts the egalitarian and universalistic myth of both the cultural and the moral planes, overturns the rationalist conception which asserts the 'neutrality' of values, and, in short, affirms the principle and the value of difference on the spiritual as on the material plane. A whole new methodology ensues. First of all, in front of a given philosophy, we wonder whether it is 'true' or 'wrong'; of a morality, we ask for a clarification of notion of 'good' and 'evil'. Well, from the point of view of the racist mentality, all this is overcome; it is not faced with the problem of truth and good, but with the question of whether a given conception can be true and a given norm can be valid and 'good' for a given race. The same thing could be said of juridical forms, of aesthetic criteria, and even of ideas of the knowledge of nature. A 'truth', a value, or a criterion, which can be valid and salutary for a given race may not be so for another race, and if adopted by it may lead it to denaturing and distortion. These are the revolutionary consequences, in the order of culture, art, thought and sociology, which derive from the theory of the races of soul and spirit, beyond those of the body – that is to say, to use the terminology adopted by us in the other works, of the racism of the second and third degree beyond that of the first degree.

We must however explain both the limits of validity of the point of view we have just expressed, and the distinction between the race of the soul and the race of the spirit. The race of the soul determines character, sensitivity, natural inclination, 'style' in action and reaction, and attitudes towards one's own experiences. We are therefore in the domain of psychology and typology: the science of types develops here into typological racism or racist typology, a discipline which Clauss has called psychoanthropology. From this point of view, the definition of race is, as we have said elsewhere, 'a human group defined not by the possession of such and such psychic and corporeal characteristics, but by the style which manifests itself through them'. We can see from this the difference between purely psychological considerations and racist ones. Psychology defines and studies some gifts and some human faculties in the abstract.

Some racists have sought to attribute these gifts and faculties to the various races in one way or another. However, 'racism of the second degree' or, if you prefer, psychoanthropology, proceeds differently. It holds that all the gifts are found in the various races, albeit to varying degrees, but that in each of these races they assume a different signification and 'functionality'. So it will not state, for example, that a certain race has as its characteristic heroism and that another has on the contrary a mercantile spirit. There are in any race men with heroic or mercantile dispositions. But given that these dispositions are present in him, the man of a given race will manifest them in accordance with this race, who in exercising these activities or these gifts, will follow a different 'style'. There are thus various ways, conditioned by inner race, to be heroes, researchers, merchants, ascetics, and so on. The feeling of honour, as manifested, for example, in the Nordic man, is not the same as that which manifests itself in a man of 'Western' or Levantine race. The same could be said of 'loyalty', and so on.

All this has been said, then, in order to explain the meaning of the concept of 'race of the soul'. The concept of 'race of the spirit' distinguishes itself from this because it no longer concerns the types of reaction of man towards the experience of the environment and the contents of his normal day-to-day experience, but rather his varying attitude towards the spiritual, supra-human and divine world, as expressed in the form of speculative systems, myths and symbols, and in the diversity of religious experience itself. Here, again, there are 'invariants' or, if you prefer, common denominators, similarities of inspiration and attitude, which refer us to an inner differentiating cause, which is precisely the 'race of the spirit'.

It is appropriate, however, to point out an obvious limitation to the racist criterion regarding the dependence of values upon the differences of race. This dependence is most real and decisive, even in the domain of spiritual manifestations, in the creations peculiar to a 'humanist' type of civilization, that is to say, a civilization in which man has precluded the possibility of an actual contact with the transcendent world and has lost any genuine understanding of the knowledge relative to that world, which is peculiar to any tradition really worthy of the name. By contrast, in a really traditional civilization, the effect of 'races of the spirit' does not go beyond a certain point, in that it does not concern the content but only the varying form of expression taken by experiences or knowledge which are identical and objective in their essence, because they refer in fact to a suprahuman order, in one people or another in one cycle of civilization or another.

Importance of the Theory of the Inner Races

The global doctrine of race explains the relations between race and spirit on the basis of these principles. The outer is the function of the inner, the physical form is the instrument, expression and symbol of a psychic form.

The aforementioned conception of the type which is really of pure race derives from this doctrine: it is the type which is 'made in one piece', it is the harmonious, coherent, unified type. It is the one in which supreme spiritual aspirations of a given kind do not find any obstacle or

contradiction in the qualities of character and in the ‘style’ of the soul of a given race, while the soul of this race, in its turn, is in a body really able to express it and make it aware.

Such a ‘pure’ type, naturally, cannot be found in any quantity in currently existing peoples, which, as stated, correspond essentially to ethnic compounds. In fact, it would not be found in any quantity even in a stock which had remained quite isolated from heterogeneous influences, because it corresponds to a limiting concept, that is to say, a culmination and a perfect resolution of race in a general sense – and it is precisely at this limit that we have stated that the supreme values of personality identify themselves with those of race.

This is why, in this respect, racialist research cannot be quantitative; it must go beyond the numerically predominant common outer elements, and it must search out the data representing a given race capable of being considered as the most complete example and the purest representative of the given type, so as to allow us to grasp and understand what finds expression in it and what animates it, that is, its inner race too, and, therefore, to have the sense of the original unity in which the various elements of a race come together. Once we have this sense, we can also get our bearings as regards the less pure types of the same race, that is of those in which the correspondence between the various outer and inner elements is not equally complete and perfect; in which, so to speak, there is a distortion of the ‘style’ of this race. It is thus a matter of qualitative study, of research based on an outer look but proceeding via an intuitive and introspective faculty. Naturally, physiognomy, the science of physiognomy, plays a large part in it: it is a commonplace to say that ‘the face expresses the soul’ – but also the body in general, the form of the skull, the proportion of the limbs, and so on, have an eloquent language for anyone who understands it. Hence a new, precise meaning of craniology, skeletology and similar apparently insensitively scientific disciplines.

Racism thus favours a new sense of the body and of the physical form in general of the human being. It is not a matter of indifference that a body has this shape rather than that one: it is not a fortuitous thing and without consequences. Anyone who has the sense of the type, in which all the elements of the human body are really unified, has also the sense of the tragic and obscure cases in which such a unity has disappeared. A soul which experiences the world as something before which it takes a stand actively, which regards the world as an object of attack and conquest, should have a face which reflects by determined and daring features this inner experience, a slim, talk, nervous straight body – an Aryan or Nordic-Aryan body. We should contrast the case in which this soul has as its expressive instruments a full and podgy face, a thickest and slow body, and in short a physical race which normally seems made to express an inferiority of a very different type. Surely, inner race will do, so to speak, violence to this heterogeneous body, will give to the features another meaning: in spite of all, it will find a way to express itself. But, to use an image from Clauss himself, it will be as if a score written for the violin was played by an ocarina.

In racial education, the fact that, in this respect too, racism is animated by a classic spirit and adopts a classic human ideal will have to be highlighted. Racism seeks an exact correspondence between the contained and the container, between interiority and exteriority. It wants men made in one piece, unified and coherent forces. It detests and opposes any promiscuity, any lacerating dualism, and, consequently, also this romantic ideology which revels in a tragic interpretation of spirituality and supposes that it is only through eternal opposition, suffering, continuous ardent desire and confused struggle, that we get nearer to the supreme values. The true superiority of Aryan races is Olympian: it manifests itself in the calm domination of the spirit over the soul and the body, which appear to it as adequate instruments of expression, in order to reflect its race in their style and their laws.

The theory of inner race is important because it brings the most pernicious aspect of cross-breeding and hybridism to light: they lead to an inner laceration and contradiction, to a rupture of the inner unity of a human being of a given race. They make it possible for souls of one race to find themselves in bodies of another race, with the result of an alteration of both elements. They create truly ‘mixed-up persons’, in the strongest sense, until, the inner force exhausting itself in conflicts and frictions of all sorts, whatever had still remained ‘dominant’ to some extent finally loses its dominance altogether and the inner race vanishes, to be replaced by an amorphous, limp substance borne by bodies in which those racial characteristics which may still subsist are now nothing but echoes, forms emptied of their profound significance. This, as we have mentioned, is the stage when internationalist and cosmopolitan myths and the ideology of the fundamental spiritual equality of the human species begin to become truths...

It is in the opposite direction, contrary to this, that we must move.

The starting point is an inner examination, meant to discover the fundamental element in us, the ‘own nature’ or spiritual race, in accordance with which we must essentially act and to which, at any cost, we must remain faithful. After this, we must seek to give to our being as much coherence and unity as possible or, at least, to act so that more favourable conditions may be found by our descendants on the basis of what has already been attained: because the plastic, formative influence exerted upon the somatic and biologic plane by an idea, when this idea has some relation to the inner primordial racial element, is a positive reality, confirmed by very precise examples, whether historical and collective or individual.

The consequences of the science of inner race in terms of political culture are also clearly apparent. Let us quote Clauss: ‘To the extent that it is given to a scientific knowledge to exert an influence on history, the task which, in this respect, psychoanthropology must carry out is the following one: it must identify these frontiers that no people, no racial and cultural community, can itself cross, or allow to be crossed by others, without running the risk of destroying itself. The research of the frontiers of the soul is thus, today, an historical task’. We must commit ourselves to the task of applying to the nation as a whole the criteria of coherence and unity, of correspondence between outer and inner elements, which we have already discussed in reference to the individual. To explain this has been the central motive of our considerations of the relation

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between race and nation.

It is thus in the nature of a complete doctrine of race to go beyond the dangers of relativism and narrow particularism, to which theories of this sort, if assumed in a unilateral and extremist manner, can give rise.

We must acknowledge especially the need to define and defend some inner frontiers, as regards culture and the 'race of the soul', corresponding to an intermediary domain between corporeality and pure spirituality, because the 'closing' which ensues from it is, in a Goethian sense, that of a 'creative limit', rather than that of a paralysing one; a limit which does not bar the way upwards, but rather that towards the bottom, towards a racial and, basically, subpersonal promiscuity, facilitating any and every process of inner denaturing, disintegration and laceration.

from "**The Path of Cinnabar**", *Difference between Higher & Lower Views on Racism*

However Meaningless to Discuss Today [...] Racist ideology, as is known, had always played a prominent role within National Socialism: generally promoted in an extremist and primitive fashion, racism represented one of the most problematic features of the Third Reich, and one in need of rectification. On the one hand, racism was associated with anti-Semitism; on the other, racism had given rise to 'pagan' tendencies, the chief exponent of which was Alfred Rosenberg. As I already mentioned when talking of Pagan Imperialism, Rosenberg- whom I had personally met- regarded me as the spokesman of an Italian current similar to his own. In fact, the differences between my own thought and that of Rosenberg were very conspicuous. In his well-known book entitled *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, Rosenberg, not unlike myself, had quoted authors such as Wirth and Bachofen in order to discuss the idea of Nordic origins, and to provide a dynamic historical analysis of various civilizations from a racist perspective.

Rosenberg's study, however, was superficial and imprecise; politically, it was aimed at serving, almost exclusively, German interests. Rosenberg also lacked any understanding of holiness and transcendence- hence his most primitive critique of Catholicism, a religion which he even attacked, in a kind of renewed Kulturkampf, by borrowing the most obsolete arguments from Enlightenment and secularist polemics.

The 'myth of the twentieth century', according to Rosenberg, was to be the myth of blood and race: 'A new myth of life that is called forth to create, along with a new kind of life, a new kind of state and of civilization.' As for the racism of the German state, it merged a sort of pan-Germanic nationalism with the ideas of biological science. With respect to the latter, I believe that Trotsky was not far off the mark when he described racism as a kind of zoological materialism. The German state embraced biology, eugenics, and the theory of heredity, accepting all the materialist assumptions behind such doctrines. This led National Socialism to posit the unilateral dependence of the superior to the inferior: of the psychic and super-biological part of man to the biological.

This materialist view was little affected by the superimposition of a vague mystique of blood. A materialist perspective was also responsible for the National Socialist illusion that mere prophylactic intervention on the biological level- an intervention, that is, upon the physical race- might automatically better all aspects of the life of peoples and nations. Where a similar analysis might have proven valid was in the idea that it is not the state, society or civilization which are of central importance, but rather race- had 'race' here been understood in its higher sense, as describing the deepest and most fundamental components of man. Also potentially valid was the National Socialist acknowledgement of the need and opportunity to 'fight for a worldview' appropriate for the Aryan man- this representing a means of promoting a broad reassessment of the values which have come to inform the Western world. A negative element, instead, was the fanatical anti-Semitism of National Socialism, something which many people have regrettably come to identify with racism tout court.

On more than one occasion in the past, I had already had my say on the issue of materialist racism. As for Nazi neopaganism, at a press conference held in 1936 at the Kulturbund of Vienna, I argued that its theories were enough 'to turn into Catholics even those best disposed towards paganism'. I should also mention the fact that Mussolini expressed his approval of one article of mine entitled 'Race and Culture' ('Razza e cultura'), which I had published in 1935 in the magazine Italian Review (Rassegna Italiana). In this article, I affirmed the pre-eminence of formative ideas over merely biological and ethnic traits (the same argument I also made in the pages of my own section in *Regime Fascista*). An editorial of mine in Balbo's newspaper, *Corriere Padano*, was also well-received by the upper echelons of the Fascist regime. The editorial was entitled 'The Duty of Being Aryan' ('Responsabilità di darsi ariani'), and was aimed at criticizing the fetish of physical race. I here denounced the irrelevance of 'Aryanness' as an expression used merely to denote individuals who are neither Jewish nor colored, rather than as a term employed in the spiritual and ethical sense to imply a certain duty towards oneself. Racism, I suggested, certainly expressed legitimate needs, but needed to be redefined on a different basis.

By exploiting my aforementioned influence in certain German circles, I sought to promote a rectification of racist ideology. The opportunity for me to take a more decisive stand on the matter, however, only presented itself in 1938, when Fascism suddenly turned 'racist' and issued its 'Race Manifesto'.

As in the case of many other policies adopted by the Fascist regime, most people today have misunderstood the Fascist embrace of racism. It is generally believed that Fascism passively followed Hitler in this regard, and that racism, in Italy, was merely something imported. It is certainly true that racist ideology had no precedents in Italy- not least because of the historical precedents of the country- and that it only took hold with difficulty. Yet, intrinsic and legitimate reasons existed for the Fascist promotion of racism. Firstly, the establishment of an empire in Africa, and the new contact with coloured peoples such an empire entailed, required a sense of remoteness, and for the racial consciousness of the Italian people to be strengthened, as- to avoid forms of dangerous promiscuity and to safeguard a necessary colonial prestige. Besides, the

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same approach was favoured by Britain until very recently- had it been maintained by Whites, it would have forestalled the kind of 'anti-colonial' uprisings which struck at the heart of a weakened Europe like a righteous Nemesis in the aftermath of the Second World War.

A second justification for the Fascist embrace of racism was the well documented anti-Fascist sentiment of international Jewry, which intensified following Italy's alliance with Germany. It was only natural, therefore, for Mussolini to react. The suffering of Jews in Fascist Italy- a small thing in comparison to that of Jews in Germany- was due to the attitude of Jews on the other side of the Alps. The third and most important reason for the Fascist adoption of racism, however, was Mussolini's ambition to invest his 'revolution' with more than a merely political significance by shaping a new kind of Italian. Mussolini correctly believed that political movements and states require adequate and well-defined human resources in order to survive and assert themselves. It is as a means to secure such resources that Mussolini first approached the myth of race and blood.

The Italian 'Race Manifesto', however, which had been hurriedly assembled on Mussolini's orders, proved a slipshod piece of work. No doubt, Italy lacked individuals capable of discussing similar issues. The same carelessness that marked the Manifesto also surfaced in the course of the Fascist racial campaign, which was partly articulated by means of cheap and virulent polemics. All of a sudden, a whole bunch of Fascist men of letters and journalists realized they were 'racists', and started using the word 'race' at every turn, to describe the most varied and less pertinent things. People also started talking of the 'Italian race', an utterly meaningless idea, given that no modern nation corresponds to one race- Italy least of all. The various European races described in racial studies rather feature as the single components of a whole in almost all Western nations.

In 1937, the publisher from Hoepli entrusted me with the writing of a history of racism. The book was entitled *The Myth of Blood* (*Il milo del sangue*), and a second edition of the work was published during the war. In this volume, I discussed the antecedents of racism in the ancient world (where 'race' was seen not as a myth, but as a living reality), and in the centuries leading up to the present day. I then outlined the modern variants of racial ideology by describing the basic ideas of de Gobineau, Woltmann, de Lapouge, Chamberlain and various other authors. I also examined racist views of anthropology, genetics, heredity and typology, and discussed the racist view of history and the foundations of anti-Semitism. Finally, I provided an outline of the various forms of political racism in Hitler's day. The book, with its descriptive character, allowed me to clarify a number of points.

The research I had conducted in order to write *The Myth of Blood* led me to develop a racial doctrine of my own. I outlined such a doctrine in a book entitled *Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race* (*Sintesi di dottrina della razza*), which was published by Hoepli in 1941 (a slightly revised edition was published in German by Runge Verlag of Berlin). The appendix of the volume included 52 photos.

One's idea of race depends on one's idea of man: the nature of each racial doctrine is determined by its conceptualization of the human being. All distortions in the field of racism derive from a materialist view of man, a view informed by science and naturalism. By contrast, at the very basis of my racial doctrine I placed the traditional idea of man as a being comprised of three elements: body, character and spirit. I argued that an exhaustive racial theory has to take all three elements into account by examining race in its threefold manifestation: as race of the body, race of the character, and race of the spirit. Racial 'purity' is found when these three races stand in harmonious balance with one another, each race shining through the other two. This, however, has long been only a rare occurrence. The most unwelcome consequence of the various cases of miscegenation which have occurred during the historical development of human society is not the alteration of the physical race and psychosomatic type- what ordinary racism is chiefly concerned with- but, rather, the divide and contrast between the three kinds of races within the same individual. As a consequence of such miscegenation, one finds men whose body no longer reflects their character, and whose emotional, moral and volitional dispositions no longer agree with their spiritual inclinations. 'Spirit' should here be distinguished from 'character' as that component of man in touch with higher values that transcend life. In this sense, the 'race of the spirit' manifests itself in the different approaches to the sacred, to destiny and to the question of life and death, as well as in world-views, religions, etc. I here argued, therefore, that three levels of racism ought to be distinguished in order to reflect the three kinds of races: the first level of racism pertaining to the race of the body, the second to the race of the character, and the third to the race of the spirit.

In my study of race, I argued that in accordance with the legitimate inner hierarchy of man, the inner race ought to be regarded as superior to the external and merely biological form. A similar approach called for a radical reassessment of the views of materialist racism, not least with respect to genetics and heredity. I rejected the fetish of merely physical racial purity, on the grounds that the purity of the external race of an individual is often preserved even when his inner race has dimmed or deteriorated (a common example of this is that of the Dutch and Scandinavians). Such an approach also put the problem of miscegenation into perspective: miscegenation certainly has negative consequences in those cases where the inner race is weak; yet if the inner race is strong, the presence of an external element, introduced- albeit not in excess- by means of interbreeding, potentially provides a galvanizing challenge (hence, the opposite problem of certain aristocratic stocks which degenerate on account of incestuous unions). These, and other, similar considerations I made in my book.

From a political and social perspective, I acknowledged the use of racism as the expression of an anti-egalitarian and anti-rationalistic approach. Racism clearly emphasizes the idea of differentiation, with regard to both the peoples and the members of a given people. Racism opposes the democratic ideology born of the Enlightenment which proclaims the identity and equal dignity of all human beings; on the contrary, racism asserts that humanity as such is either an abstract and fictitious concept, or the final stage in a process of degeneration, dissolution and collapse- a stage only to be posited as an outmost limit never actually to be reached. Human

nature, instead, is ordinarily differentiated, and this differentiation is expressed in the form of different bloodlines and races. This differentiation constitutes the primary feature of humanity: not only is it a natural condition among all beings, but also a positive element, something which ought to exist, and ought to be defended and safeguarded. The acknowledgement of diversity never led me- unlike certain other racists- to conceive humanity as a series of isolated, self-contained units; nor did it lead me to reject all higher principles. A kind of unity is certainly conceivable for humanity, but only at a higher level; and such unity accepts and preserves differentiation at a lower level. Unity 'from below', on the other hand, is a regressive phenomenon: such is the levelling unity sought by democracy, 'integrationism', humanitarianism, pseudo-universalism and collectivism. De Gobineau had already criticized similar ideas, essentially by promoting racism in aristocratic terms.

The other, generally positive aspect of racism is its anti-rationalism, which accompanies the racist embrace of differentiation as an attempt to valorize the kind of qualities, dispositions and dignities which cannot be bought, gained or replaced, which do not derive from an external influence or from the environment, which are related to the living whole of an individual person, and which have their roots in a deep, organic terrain. Such is the foundation of the individual person, as opposed to the merely abstract or amorphous individual. My aforementioned racial theory provided a safe key to approach these issues by emphasizing the fact that human races cannot be discussed in the same terms as horse or cat breeds: for human life, unlike the life of animals, is not confined to instincts and bios.

The notion of an 'inner race', and of its pre-eminence over the external race, was particularly useful in two regards. On the one hand, from a moral point of view, this doctrine presented each race as an independent essence regarded as a universal in itself, almost as a Platonic 'idea' - although each race might empirically be understood in conjunction to a given physical race, among a given people. A similar analysis could practically be applied to the use of the terms 'Aryan' and 'Jewish', here understood as indicative of a series of attitudes that may or may not be found among all people of Aryan or Jewish blood. Such a use of the two terms would have provided a safeguard against conceit and one-sidedness: for what ultimately counted the most, in my view, was the inner form of each individual. As anticipated in my article in *Corriere Padano*, my doctrine of the inner race also implied a number of duties. It is for this reason, I may add, that after the war I was to emphasize the futility, from a superior perspective, of dwelling on the 'Jewish' or 'Aryan' question: for the negative behaviour which Jews are charged with is now common among most 'Aryans' (who, unlike Jews, lack the extenuating circumstance of any hereditary predisposition).

Moreover, the notion of inner race implied the idea of race as a moulding energy. Thus, the development of a definite human type free of ethnic miscegenation might be explained on the grounds of an inner moulding power, which finds its most direct manifestation in a given civilization or tradition. A notable example of this phenomenon is provided by the Jewish people: originally lacking any ethnic unity (in a physical sense), the Jews came to possess recognizable

hereditary traits thanks to their tradition, ultimately coming to embody one of the clearest historical examples of strenuous racial unity. A more recent example is that of North American society: for Americans have come to show rather constant racial traits (particularly in terms of inner race) thanks to the moulding power of their civilization, which has shaped an extraordinarily mixed ethnic whole. My approach, therefore, ruled out the possibility that populations might be conditioned by biological factors alone.

The practical possibilities of applying my racial doctrine to the field of what Vacher de Lapouge termed 'political anthropology' were self-evident. In a country where the state embodies the role of a superior, active and moulding principle, an attempt to favour the differentiation of the ethnic make-up of the population is certainly a conceivable prospect. In this regard, National Socialism was not entirely mistaken. What ought to have been distinguished in Germany was negative racism- understood as a means to protect the nation from dangerous forms of miscegenation- from positive racism- which is aimed at fostering diversity within the national community in order to define and strengthen a superior human type. Modern racism goes beyond the broad racial distinctions found in school textbooks (those between the White race and the Black, Yellow, etc.): for even the White, 'Aryan' or Indo-European race ought to be divided into smaller groupings: the Mediterranean race, the Nordic, the Dinaric, the Slav, Ostid, etc. (such terms significantly varying among different authors). In his *Rassenseelekunde*, L.R Clauss had also sought to provide a description of the soul and inner character of these different races, which are present in every European nation to various degrees. The aim of political racism ought to have been that of determining which race should be granted pre-eminence in the case of each country, and allowed to shape the nation. In the case of Germany, this race was the Nordic Aryan.

I personally addressed the same question with regard to Italy, and reached the conclusion that the central, guiding race of the country was to be the Roman Aryan race, a race that in ancient times had broken away from the same branch which had later engendered the Nordic race. In my book, I provided a description of the Roman Aryan type primarily in terms of its inner race (I provided a rough outline of the typology of the various 'races of the spirit'). In a separate chapter, I also discussed the prospect of an ethnic rectification of Italy aimed at reducing the widespread 'Mediterranean' elements in favour of the Roman Aryan- this, it goes without saying, from the point of view of sensibility and customs. I here described the elite as a governing class which would not only possess authority, power and prestige thanks to its position, but also embody a superior human type, where external and inner race would ideally coincide. The book also contained an iconographic appendix with photos and images in order to provide initial guidance in the study of the various races of the body, of the character and of the spirit, and of the consequences of interfering with them.

My book, no doubt, provided an original approach to racism, which avoided the chief pitfalls that marked the German approach. In my study of the subject, I raised a number of points which, I believe, remain valid even outside the specific context in which they were first formulated.

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From a historical perspective, it might be interesting to note that Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race was openly approved by Mussolini. After reading the book, Mussolini got in touch with me, praising the work beyond its real merit on the grounds that the doctrine it espoused was just what he needed. My racial doctrine, Mussolini believed, might allow him to engage with the same issues addressed in Germany, thus 'conforming' to Germany, while at the same time maintaining an independent approach based on a spiritual drive (the primacy of the spirit which German racism generally lacked). In particular, Mussolini believed that my theory regarding the Roman Aryan race, and the myth which accompanied it, might serve both to integrate the Roman ideal of Fascism and to provide a foundation for his attempt to rectify and elevate the Italian people- to create, as it were, a new kind of Italian- by means of the Fascist 'revolution' and state.

[...] As should be evident from what I have written so far, mine had been an attempt to engage with the issue of race from a superior, spiritual perspective. Racism I actually regarded as a secondary matter: my purpose was rather that of contrasting the errors of the materialist and primitive brand of racism which had surfaced in Germany, and which some people amateurishly sought to emulate in Italy. This field, too, I explored in accordance with my own inclinations, and nothing I then wrote I now truly disown- although I acknowledge the meaninglessness of any attempt to resume similar discussions today. [...]

The Right to One's Own Life in East and West

In these brief notes I shall not attempt to deal with the question of the right to life in general, but with the right to one's own life, which corresponds to the ancient formula of *jus vitae necisque*. It is the right to accept human existence, or to put an end to it voluntarily. I intend to compare certain characteristic points of view which have been formulated in this connection in the East and in the West.

However, the problem will not be considered from a social point of view, but rather from an interior spiritual one, whence it appears in the shape of a problem of responsibility only to our own selves. For this reason, I shall not deal with theories, such as that of the Japanese *hara-kiri*, or suicide for reasons of honour or loyalty, nor with similar doctrines which we also find in the West.

Perhaps the severest and most virile form in which the right to dispose freely of one's own earthly existence is asserted in the West is found in the theory of Stoicism, and more particularly in the Stoicism of Seneca. This doctrine of suicide, unique on account of the peculiar ethos with which it is justified, may serve for us as a starting point. Seneca and the Roman Stoics conceived earthly existence in the form of a struggle and a test. According to Seneca the real man stands above the gods themselves. The gods, owing to their very nature, do not know adversity and disaster. Man, by contrast, is subject to these, but also has the power of triumphing over them. Unhappy is he who has never encountered disaster and suffering, Seneca wrote, for he has had no occasion to put his own powers to the test and to know them. To man something greater than

mere exemption from ills has been granted: the power of triumphing over them within himself. And those beings who have been most subject to trials should be regarded as the worthiest, if we bear in mind that in war the commanders entrust the most exposed positions to the strongest and best qualified men, whereas the less brave, the weaker, and the less trustworthy are employed in the less difficult, but also less glorious positions of the rear.

In a general way, this is also the order of ideas brought forward when suicide is condemned and stigmatized as a form of cowardice and desertion. Seneca instead comes to the opposite conclusion, and actually attributes the justification of suicide to God himself (*De Provid.*, VI, 7–9). He makes God say that he has granted to the true man and the wise man a power beyond all contingencies; that he has so disposed things that no one may be restrained when he no longer wishes to be; the way of departure is open to him: *latet exitus*. “Whenever you do not wish to fight, retreat is ever possible. Nothing easier is granted to you than to die.” The expression used, “*si pugnare non vultis, licet fugere*,” with reference to the voluntary death which the wise man is free to choose, may leave us perplexed. But the actual context within the ethics of Stoicism as a whole explains what is meant here.

There can be no doubt that when death is sought because a certain situation appears unbearable, from the point of view of virile ethics, suicide cannot be justified. In those very cases where a humanitarian point of view might admit the right to commit suicide, virile ethics cannot excuse it. Still less does it permit a man to take his own life through motives of affection or passion, because this would imply a passive attitude, and one of impotence with regard to one’s own spirit, thus deserving condemnation. Strictly speaking, from the point of view of Stoicism, suicide even for honour or similar motives (i.e., with reference to social conditions), is not admitted.

The Stoic must distinguish between “that which depends on oneself” and “that which does not depend on oneself,” and must follow the principle that that which does not depend on oneself does not pledge one’s responsibility, must not affect the mind of the wise man, and must not constitute the measure of one’s own value or dignity. As we know, this principle of detachment is in harmony with all that which India has regarded as truly spiritual. When we consider this, Seneca’s maxim can only indicate the importance to be attributed to the inner liberty of a higher being. It is not a question of retreating because we do not feel strong enough to face certain circumstances or trials. It is rather a case of the sovereign right, which we should always reserve for ourselves, of accepting or not accepting these trials, and also of placing a limit to them when we no longer see any meaning in them, or have sufficiently proved to ourselves our own capacity for overcoming them. Impassiveness thus remains the presupposition of that maxim, and the right of “exit” is justified only as one of the factors which may assure us that the vicissitudes in which we are involved have our consent; that in them we are truly active, that we are not merely making a virtue of necessity. This point of view is rational and unimpeachable.

Things would, however, present another aspect if we were to apply the heteronomous framework common to theistic and religious conceptions to the agonistic and virile conception of life.

Cicero attributes to Pythagoras the following saying: "To quit the post which has been entrusted to us in life is not permissible without the orders of the Chief, i.e., of God." That is the same view as that of Catholic moral theology, which actually reaches the point of condemning these who seek unnecessary martyrdom as guilty of sin.

Nevertheless, this appeal to an almost military form of fealty comes up against certain objections, because it presupposes a prior free and conscious devotion to a Chief. But from the point of view of Western religion we cannot speak of this, because that religious tradition denies that the soul exists before being associated with the body in this life. We suddenly find ourselves in the "post" mentioned above, because before being there we had no existence at all; we are thus there without having willed or accepted it. We cannot then speak of responsibility, or of "military duty," or of a debt for a life received, but not asked for. Hence the prohibition on suicide has no inner logic; there is only an appeal to faith, a mere acceptance of the will of God.

In Seneca's conception, the horizon is broader and freer; there remains the idea of finding ourselves through our place in a conflict. And there remains the general command of holding fast, but the person is conceived as being free, and it is the person who has the last word. It is thus on the basis of considerations of a different and interior nature that he must decide as to his own responsibility and his actual right to his own life.

Up to this point we have dealt with Western points of view. Let us now see how matters stand in a doctrine such as that of the Hindus and particularly that of the Buddhists, in which the implications of Western theism are absent (i.e., the relations between a created being and a creator) and in which man is left to himself and has only to consider the natural consequences of his acts. We believe that the East has a specific and interesting conception only on such a horizon. But from every other point of view the same problems of Western religion present themselves also in the East.

According to the above-mentioned Oriental conception, the same prohibition against suicide of the more usual type is first of all affirmed. Wherever we reach the point of renouncing life in the name of life itself—that is to say on account of one or other form of the will to live and to enjoy—suicide is condemned. (On this point the Eastern view differs little from the Western.) In such cases the act of committing suicide is not judged as a form of liberation, but rather as an extreme, albeit negative, form of attachment to life, of dependence on life. No transfiguration after death can be expected by one who resorts to such violence on himself. In a different state of being the law of an existence devoid of light, of peace, and of stability will simply reassert itself once more. Thus, the problem will in no wise be solved by the act of suicide. Buddhism comes to the point of regarding even the inclination towards extinction, towards nirvana, as a deviation, when it appears as a desire or yearning. It is a Taoist saying that man attempts to free himself from death, but does not try to free himself from life.

At the same time, however, Buddhism, like Stoicism, admits suicide. But in whom? Once again, in a superior human being, in whom the characteristics of the Stoic wise man are to be found further strengthened: in a man who has realized such an absolute detachment that he has gone virtually beyond living and nonliving. Thus it is said that Mara, the demon of this world but also of the world of Brahma, sought in vain for the soul of the ascetic Channo who had “seized the weapon.”

Here, however, other difficulties arise. In the first place, if we have attained detachment, what can lead us to choose a voluntary death? In terms of the actual instances cited in the Oriental lore, the meaning does not seem to be very different from what it is in Stoicism. In certain circumstances, there is no reason to involve oneself beyond a particular point. We may “emerge,” almost as if we had had enough of a particular game—or as may happen when we wave off a fly, after having allowed it to crawl over our nose for a certain time.

But up to what point can we be sure of ourselves in such cases? He who has attained that spiritual perfection which renders the act permissible can hardly fail to find, in a certain measure, a super-personal significance in his existence on earth, realizing at the same time that this existence, taken as a whole, is but an episode, a transition, “a voyage during the hours of the night,” as the Oriental philosophers tell us. Oriental metaphysics in fact admits a multiplicity of states of being, of which the being of mankind is but a particular and contingent one.

Once this is admitted, is not a feeling of impatience, of intolerance, even of boredom, evidence of a human residue of weakness? Is it not evidence of something not yet resolved or placated by the sense of eternity, or at least of the great non-earthly and non-temporal distances? And when things are thus, should we not be held, in the face of our own selves, not to act, not to “seize the weapon”?

We should, moreover, also bear in mind another order of considerations.

When I speak of “my life,” adding that I am free to dispose of what is “mine” at my own good pleasure, I am acting without adequate reflection. In the texts of Pali Buddhism the relativity of this ill-considered talk about what is “mine” is effectively presented to us. It is said in those texts that just as a sovereign has the power of having whomever he wishes executed, outlawed, or pardoned in his own kingdom, similarly if I could say that this body, this life, is truly “mine” and “myself,” the wish that it should be so or not be so, could eventually be carried into effect. But that is not the case.

Moreover, strictly speaking, if life were our own in the absolute sense, it should be possible to bring our earthly existence to an end without even a violent act on our own body, but rather through a purely spiritual act. Once more, however, this proves impossible for almost the whole of mankind—only certain special forms of Yoga, of a Tantric inflection, admit the exceptional possibility of the so-called iccha-mrityu, of the death at will. This is tantamount to admitting something like an inner bond, a kind of will bound to a life which I cannot regard as extraneous to myself, but which at the same time I cannot identify with my own true will. We cannot fail to

take this situation into account.

It corresponds to the problem of our own existence as a certain definite sort of being. And any solution akin to that of the knot cut by the sword of Alexander the Great, is not a true solution. The fact of being, united to the impossibility of not being, gives us the disturbing hint of some sort of enigmatic, primal choice—almost as though we were involved and responsible in some obscure manner.

In this order of ideas, however, we cannot go too far when, following the views either of materialism or of Western religion, we consider the principle of life and of consciousness in physical birth. If we accept this, it is difficult finally to avoid a conception such as that of the *Geworfenheit* of certain Western existentialist philosophers: man as the being who finds himself “thrown” into time (in the East one would say into *samsara*), into a “situation” which involves and binds him to a responsibility, yet on a basis that is impenetrably irrational.

This obscurity is certainly not solved by bringing in religious faith; indeed, generally speaking, the merit of faith is said to actually consist in accepting without wishing to understand. In the present instance it is a case of accepting a position which, hypothetically, has no connection of any kind, manifest or concealed, with that which may be attributed to my own will. Among Western existentialists, such as Heidegger or Sartre, this faith is atheistic and disconsolate. They do not even believe that the meaning which we are unable to see in our own lives today, might be grasped in a different state of being, as per the resigned hope of the believing Christian.

If we turn to the East, we encounter a different situation. Oriental traditions as a rule have admitted that we exist prior to earthly life, assuming a relation of cause and effect—and sometimes even of a choice—between the real force existing before physical birth and individual existence. (We know, however, that this doctrine was professed also in the ancient West, for instance by Plato and Plotinus.) In this case, although earthly existence cannot be attributed to the mere external will of the Ego, it represents a development associated with a deeper will, but always at the same time forming part of my own integral being.

If, therefore, life here below is not an accident, then it cannot be considered a thing to be arbitrarily accepted or rejected. Nor can it be considered a bare and meaningless existential fact, before which there is only the choice of resignation or of a continuous test of resistance.

Similarly problematic is the idea that earthly existence is something with which, before we find ourselves in the human state, we have, so to speak, “compromised” ourselves and are to a certain extent implicated—either, if we wish, as in an adventure, or as in a mission, a test, or election, accepting en bloc and beforehand even the tragic, problematic, or squalid aspects that the human condition in general may present. With this idea we may give a fairly satisfactory account of what we have just stated concerning the problem as to what may be regarded only conditionally and partially as “mine” and which nevertheless pledges myself.

Traditional Oriental doctrines open similar horizons. As we have already stated, that superiority, or even simply that detachment from life, which alone might authorize us to cast it aside if we wished to do so, can hardly be dissociated from the sentiment of such horizons. We may confer on suicide the significance of an extreme instance establishing our own sovereignty; this is indeed the point most strikingly brought out by the Western Stoic theory.

Nevertheless, in few cases does resort to suicide present a positive and intelligible character. Every one of us knows that sooner or later the end will come, which means that the wisest attitude in the face of every contingency should be that of discovering its inner meaning or significance in a wider complex—a complex which, at bottom, according to the above-mentioned point of view, is centred in ourselves and is associated with a kind of prenatal and transcendent will of our own.

We may find an isolated instance in one who seeks death indirectly, along a line in which death and the achievement of the ultimate significance of our own lives coincide—thereby realizing the plurality of the meanings comprised in the Greek word *telos*, which signifies the aim as well as the achievement or perfection, and the end. In Western classical antiquity a similar possibility was grasped and justified even on a non-spiritual and hedonistic plane. At one time, the Roman Senate justified and even facilitated the decision of him who, feeling that he had attained the apex of a perfect life, had no wish to descend, to subject himself to decay, wherefore he put an end to his own life happily and willingly.

Independently of this, within the order of ideas considered by us and comparing Western and Eastern views, we may in a general way set aside the solution (or non-solution) associated with an act of violence against our own physical life, that associated with “testing fate” through the many aspects of a heroic, intense, or even merely hazardous existence. Again in Seneca we find a strange dictum, which may have some connection with this point: “The wise man casts himself of his own free will into the open abyss.” While we do not remember his exact words, the great Tibetan ascetic Milarepa used a similar expression.

There are many ways for a detached spirit to submit to “destiny,” but a necessary and indispensable inquiry must be undertaken as to the extent to which some deep impersonal reason exists for a man’s continued survival on this earth.

And when this questioning leads us to situations where the border between life and death is also the limit of significance and fullness of living—thus in a manner different from that which may occur in a state of exaltation and of mere rapture—then indeed we shall have attained the best state of mind for realizing all the conditions hitherto considered.

From the consideration of this last point we see that from the problem we have discussed, with reference both to Western and Eastern doctrines, practical conclusions may be drawn—especially with regard to the phase which the West is now going through. In another article in this volume, we pointed out that it is not by mere accident that a philosophy, in itself fairly mediocre and muddy such as existentialism, should have recently achieved so much success in Europe. The

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fact is that it has echoed states of mind which the circumstances of recent times, and also those now in course of preparation, have widely fostered. The sense of Heidegger's *Geworfenheit* (the feeling of being "thrown" into the world), of situations from which we may not extricate ourselves, in which for the individual "there is no excuse" (Sartre), plus the growing insecurity of existence, life "being drawn towards extreme temperatures" or towards regions where anonymity in the negative, collectivist sense appears to menace human existence with the total destruction of all meaning and justification: all this is indeed part of the present-day Western world, and it is possible that it may also portend what is to come in the East. In the face of this state of things, existentialism corresponds to the situation of one who finds himself with his back to the wall, without any possibility of escape, at the particularly unstable point of a final inner resistance, beyond which there is nothing left but a complete breakdown.

Thus, this problem may present a certain real interest for a particular type of Western man of today, and for the Oriental man of tomorrow. One who, having lived through what Nietzsche has called "European nihilism," and who, after having realized the problematic character of the value of life, does not feel himself able to face the path of pure detachment—but having integrated his own spiritual horizon with the views set forth above, attempts in spite of everything to find a solution to the human problem along the path of action.

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Zen and the West

Zen may be regarded as the last discovery of Western spiritual circles in sympathy with Oriental wisdom. Interest in Zen began to arise in 1927 when D.

T. Suzuki published his Essays on Zen Buddhism, following a short note which appeared as far back as 1907 in the Journal of the Pali Texts Society and some articles in the Eastern Buddhist from 1921 to 1939. Another work, Kwaiten Nukariya's The Religion of the Samurai (1913), although important, had attracted little attention. On the other hand, after the Second World War, Suzuki's essays were reprinted, not only in the original English edition, but also in a French translation which was very soon out of print.

In France, even a sort of center for studies and publications inspired by Zen ideas has been created, and its chief exponent is Hubert Benoit. In his two volumes entitled *La doctrine suprême* (1952) and in his recently issued work *Laissez Prise* (1954) Benoit has attempted to illustrate certain Zen conceptions in terms of practical individual psychology, also making good use of his own previous experience as a psychoanalyst.

Interest in Zen has also extended to Germany, Switzerland, and Central Europe through translations of particular works. In this connection we may mention Ohasama Shuei's *Zen, der lebendige Buddhismus in Japan* (1925), and Karlfried Graf von Dürckheim's *Japan und die Kultur der Stille* (1950), wherein Zen is considered from the point of view of its influence on the

general Japanese outlook on life. Finally, we should mention the intervention of the well-known Swiss psychoanalyst C. G. Jung, who has written yet another allegedly “clarifying” introduction to Suzuki’s book, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (1948). It may be important to study the reasons for this interest which Zen is arousing in the West, outside the specialized circle of Oriental scholars.

From an exterior point of view, these reasons may be connected with some of the so-called surrealist and existentialist aspects of Zen teaching, especially when they have as their basis the koan and mondo. These refer to episodes, answers, and dialogues concerning the ancient Masters of Zen, abounding in irrational, paradoxical, and sometimes even grotesque elements, submitted to the meditations of disciples as a means for testing their capacity to understand that which surpasses the ordinary categories of logical and discursive thought. In fact, if we stop at the outward character of these peculiar documents of Zen, we are led to think of the style and the intentions of certain para-artistic compositions, which are not only “surrealistic” but above all “dadaistic,” aiming at something which goes beyond a mere *épater le bourgeois* by means of jumbles of words and associations of ideas devoid of logic and unintelligible to common sense.

But this external analogy already indicates the major difference regarding the point to be arrived at. The difference consists of the presence of a metaphysical background in one case, in Zen, and in the utter lack of such a background in the second case, wherein everything is reduced to a disordered urge to evasion, to the will to evoke “the primordial, incoherent, howling, mad, and burning chaos” (as expressed by Tristan Tzara, the creator of Dadaism), without any positive element as serving as a counterpart to a problematic destruction and disintegration of normal mentality.

Something of the same kind should be said with regard to external affinities between Zen and certain varieties of Western existentialism. It is often claimed by masters of Zen that spiritual enlightenment, satori or sambodhi, intervenes when all the resources of one’s own being are exhausted and one is on the verge of collapse, when, on the intellectual plane, in the fervent efforts of the disciple, these extreme limits of understanding are reached, before which the mind both of the common mortal and of the professional philosopher draws back.

Moreover, proper to Zen is the search for a directly lived and personal experience, with a strong polemical element against traditional ethical forms, against conformist rules, writings, and prescriptions. The Zen ideal of spiritual freedom in certain cases leads even to iconoclasm and lawlessness. “If you encounter Buddha or one of the Patriarchs of Zen on your path, kill him,” says Rinzai, one of the greatest teachers of Zen.

No idol, no image, no outward reference must take us out of ourselves. “Let go your hold” is another word of command, and its meaning is that we should abandon all support, detach ourselves from all ties, both external and internal. To a disciple who thought that he had given proof of emancipation by burning the books of Confucius, the Master said: “You would do better to burn the books which are within yourself.”

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If to all this we add the fact that the problem of going beyond the conflict between the finite and the infinite—between these two existential elements of individual experience which are co-existing yet contradictory—is a fundamental theme of Zen, it would seem that there is a clear convergence with themes deemed important by existentialism, beginning with Søren Kierkegaard.

But here we must repeat the aforementioned reservation, which now concerns particularly the antecedents of existentialism as “the philosophy of crisis”: Western materialism and nihilism, the inherent crisis of all established values.

By contrast, Zen has always had as its antecedent, as its background, and as its solid basis, the great spiritual tradition of Buddhism, integrated with certain aspects of Taoism.

It is sufficiently well-known that Zen, in its spirit, may be regarded as a return to the Buddhism of the origins. Buddhism was born as a vigorous reaction against the speculations and empty ritualism into which the ancient priestly caste of India had fallen. Buddha wiped the slate clean, raising instead the practical problem of overcoming that which the popular mind regards as “the sorrow of existence,” but which in the inner teaching appears more generally as the state of restlessness, of agitation, of craving, and of forgetfulness of common humanity.

Having followed the path of Awakening, of Immortality, himself and without the help of others, the Buddha showed it to those who also felt called.

In the subsequent developments of Buddhism, the same situation against which the Buddha had reacted was to arise again: Buddhism became a religion with its own dogmas, its own ritual, its own scholasticism, its own minute moral rules. Zen once more wiped the slate clean, and raised to preeminence that which had constituted the vital nucleus of Buddhism in its original form: the conquest of enlightenment, of inner awakening. This, in fact, is satori.

It is the same nirvana that the Mahayana school had already liberated from the outer features of a negative and evanescent reality, and had conceived in the positive terms of bodhi, that is to say of enlightenment itself. The Zen doctrine of satori brings forward the radical discontinuity between enlightenment and the whole content of ordinary consciousness, but likewise between the actual experience of satori and all the methods, techniques, and forms of discipline that may be brought into operation to propitiate it.

If these are the antecedents of Zen, it is clear that nothing of the kind is present in the Occidental mind. The antecedent of Western existentialism is at best the Christian religion, which is quite different from everything Buddhist, because in genuine Buddhism there can be no question of devotional religion in the true sense, and still less of a theistic religion. We have said “at best,” because in the more extreme forms of Western existentialism all reference to religion is lacking, and its antecedent is rather the purely nihilistic experience—the “European nihilism” of Nietzsche—which, in the West, has been the logical consequence of a civilization exclusively centred in man and devoid of any transcendent reference.

This leads us to consider a further problem with all the analogies whereby Westerners come to take an interest in Zen. Zen takes over from Mahayana the paradoxical equation nirvana = samsara, which is tantamount to the theory of the identity of the immanent and transcendent reality. That which is strictly proper to satori, to enlightenment, is an experience in which every antithesis is overcome, in which the finite is perceived in its genuine finitude—wherein all antitheses break down, such as those of spirit and body, “inner” and “outer,” subject and object, good and evil, substance and accident, even life and death. A higher unity is the key feature of the being and of the form of experience of one who has secured, as in a lightning flash, as in a sudden ontological alteration of level, satori.

It is unnecessary to point out how seductive these horizons may seem to certain Western minds. No less seductive is the Zen theory according to which we must follow our own nature alone, that all evil and unhappiness come to man from that which is built up artificially by intellect and will, neutralizing and inhibiting the original spontaneity of one’s own being. Suzuki does not realize the misunderstanding that he creates when, perhaps with a view to making himself better understood by his Western readers, he speaks in this connection of “Life,” and nearly brings Zen into the frame of an irrationalist “philosophy of life.”

Now, as a matter of fact, that which in Zen is “Life” and spontaneity of life is actually synonymous with Tao: something very different from the confused notions of an essentially sub-rational and sub-intellectual order, which stand in the centre of the immanent and vitalistic philosophies of the West—at bottom merely the decadent by-products of the speculative tradition of Europe.

And here we should emphasize an especially important point: the conquest of satori is preceded by a kind of ordeal by fire (a “baptism by fire” as Suzuki says). We must first be capable of absolute self-sacrifice and self-overcoming, of “vomiting completely our own Ego,” as a teacher of Zen has said; only after this can the kingdom of a higher spontaneity open up, a spontaneity which we might define as transcendental, referring essentially to the Taoist notion of “acting without acting” (wei-wu-wei in Chinese, musa in Japanese).

As a counterpart we also have the Zen notion of “acting without merit,” of acting without troubling ourselves about sanctions or rewards or finalities associated with all that is particular. This is the very idea of nishkama-karma, which, as we know, is at the heart of the Bhagavad-Gita.

In relation to all this, it should also be borne in mind that the Zen ideal is not actually a withdrawal from the world; the true life according to Zen is, on the contrary, life in the world, and no form of activity is excluded. Zen is known for Halls of Meditation (zendo in Japanese, ch’an t’ang in Chinese), which are a kind of monastic retreat, the discipline of which is by no means less strict than that of many contemplative and ascetic Western orders. Only after having acquired the necessary qualifications in a zendo (for which many years may be necessary, without any certainty that success will always be achieved), the follower of Zen returns to the

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world, if he wishes, and lives the life of the world.

He now lives it having at his disposal the new spiritual dimension which he owes to satori.

This makes very clear the difference between Zen and that Western cult of instinct and spontaneity, which has its roots in a substratum which we may well call sub-personal. He who thinks that he can find in Zen the confirmation of a form of ethics of alleged "freedom," but which is instead only intolerance of all inner discipline, of all command emanating from the higher parts of one's own being, will be greatly deceived. The spontaneous character of Zen, the freedom which can even go "beyond good and evil" presupposes an actual "second birth," an event of which Western immanent and vitalistic theories have not even a suspicion. We greatly fear that this very misunderstanding is one of the principal reasons for the influence which Zen can exercise on certain Western minds. In a secondary way another element, likewise a source of misunderstanding, is the polemical attitude which Zen at times takes toward techniques of Yoga and to the dhyana of the type practiced in certain Buddhist circles.

This would seem to render things even easier: no special discipline would be needed to attain "Awakening." We can here recognize a legitimate protest against those false interpretations of Yoga, which present it as a collection of practices and a training which, automatically and without any existential implication, can lead to extraordinary spiritual results. And yet even here we fall into misunderstandings.

The fact is that in Zen texts data are rarely given about the entire inner work that precedes the intervention of satori, and about the possibly exceptional predispositions on which it is conditional. The coming of satori is compared to the sudden ringing of a bell; but an enormous concentration of forces, a whole development of spiritual tensions precedes that event and is a condition for it, even if it does not actually bring it about. Thus, things are not made easier but rather more difficult than they are where precise techniques and disciplines are indicated. Instead, one trusts the action of the Masters or the accidental circumstances of life which give the final shock whereby the inward eye is opened, which add the last drop whereby the vessel overflows and the "alteration of level" occurs.

We say again that among these imponderables, which make up the antecedents of Awakening, we must include the element associated with spiritual atmosphere and Tradition: they are implications that we do not find in the West, where if satori of the Zen type is not excluded, yet for these reasons it constitutes an even more exceptional, unforeseen, and informal event than is the case in the East. A Zen saying is that "Tao may be transmitted only to him who already has it." It may be justly compared with the following dictum of the alchemical Hermetism of the Middle Ages: "If you wish to make gold, you must already have it."

Furthermore, we should consider relations between Zen and Western psychoanalysis. In this connection we are not referring to Benoit, who has limited himself to making use of certain aspects of the method, while with regard to general foundations he has sought to follow the point of view of the teachers of Zen. It is rather the case of Jung who, as we have already said, has

written an introduction to one of Suzuki's books, and also elsewhere—for instance, in his commentary on the Taoist text *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, translated by Wilhelm—has attempted to put forth an interpretation of his own.

Jung states that “the analogy of satori with Western experience is confined to those few Christian mystics whose sayings for the sake of paradox skirt the border of heterodoxy or have actually overstepped it.” In a general way, he holds that in the West Zen would be understood only with great difficulty. In any case, Jung says, “the only movement within our culture which partly has and partly should have some understanding of these aspirations, is psychoanalysis,” in the sense of his psychoanalysis, which is based on the theory of the vital Unconscious, of the archetypes and of the so-called “process of individuation” (*Individuationsprozess*).

In this there is a misunderstanding even greater than those we have previously pointed out. To realize this, it is enough to say that according to Jung, the true and positive meaning, not only of religions but also of mysticism and of the initiatory doctrines, would be that of curing the soul torn and tortured by complexes; in other words, it would be to transform a neuropathic and abnormal man into a normal man. In the above-quoted comment he states outright that should symbols and myths, such as those of the Taoists, have a metaphysical and not merely a psychological significance, they would be absolutely incomprehensible to him.

Now what we find in every spiritual and traditional doctrine is something very different. The sound and normal man is here not the point of arrival, but the point of departure, and means are provided whereby he who wishes, if he has the true vocation, may attempt the adventure of effectively overcoming the human condition: or, from a sound man is made a sick one, sick with the sickness of the infinite.

Leaving this aside, Jung seriously believes that the anti-intellectual polemic that is proper to Zen has something to do with the one in which psychoanalysis indulges in the name of Life and of the Unconscious, and that the inner unification and spontaneity produced by satori are those secured by the conscious Ego, when, obeying the psychotherapeutic ethics of psychoanalysis, it relinquishes its claim to intellectual superiority and comes to an agreement with the ancestral and even biological Unconscious.

All this is nonsense, if only due to the fact that the Unconscious, conceived as an entity of its own, is unknown to Zen, and that the ideal of Zen is not to integrate oneself into this superstitiously hypostasized Unconscious of psychoanalysis, but to destroy it by bringing light into the subterranean zone of one's own being by means of Enlightenment and Awakening. And again, it is not here a question of “psychological” depths, but of metaphysical and ontological depths, wherein, as we have seen, Jung has openly admitted himself incompetent.

The balance-sheet of our criticism thus seems to be somewhat negative, if Zen is to be considered in its absolute aspect as a doctrine of initiates, like that secret knowledge which, according to Tradition, has been transmitted outside of all written works by Buddha to his disciple Mahakasyapa. But we should further consider Zen according to that which may be

derived from it in terms of a vision of life in general and of a particular type of conduct.

In this connection, we must take into account what various authors have brought to light concerning the part which Zen has played above all in Japanese life. Here we also find some doctrines of a general bearing, such as that of an inner calm and of a special meditation, of a brief immobility of the body, and various others which, it appears, are not followed in Japan only by men having an exceptional vocation, but are widespread everywhere.

Somebody has called Zen the religion of the Samurai, that is to say, of the Japanese warrior nobility. In this connection Zen tends to bring about an inner stability, enabling us to act with detachment; in certain circumstances there emerges from it a capacity for self-sacrifice and for heroism which has nothing romantic in it, but is a natural possibility in a being who "has let go his grasp," who has loosened the tie of the Ego. In a general way, this condition of inner steadfastness has been felicitously compared to the hinge of a door which stays firm even when the door is struck.

In a more general way, two other aspects of Zen may be treated. One is the symbolization of even ordinary forms of activity. As a particular instance, it has been said that Zen-do, or the way of Zen, is identical with Ken-do, or the way of the sword. This means that with an exercise, such as that of the sword, a symbolic significance may be associated, capable of making one foresee the truth of Zen.

To cite another example, the relation existing between the Masters of Zen and the "Masters of tea" has been pointed out; even in a circumstance so commonplace for a Westerner as that of serving and taking tea, the significance of a perfect rite may be concealed.

This brings us to the second aspect of life according to Zen, an aspect which might be summed up in the maxim of Lao-tzu: "To be a whole within the fragment." It is the manner of being wholly oneself in that which one does and in conferring on what one does, whatever it may be, a character of perfection, of completeness. In these circumstances, in every act the whole may be contained, and in every act there may be satori.

All these are undoubtedly elements of a superior style of life, elements of a "culture" in the higher sense, of which even the Westerner may appreciate the value, especially in their sharp contrast with all that which in the Western world is agitation, haste, exteriority, disorderly action, and "productivity," without any deep roots. Perhaps it is above all in this connection that the interest of a Westerner in Zen may be devoid of misunderstandings.

But apart from a purely intellectual interest, the measure in which we may also pass to a formative and living action depends on that in which those elements of style may have an autonomy, that is to say, may be detached from a background which, as we have seen, is profoundly different in the East and in the West.

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Spiritual Virility in Buddhism

It is the fate of almost all religions to become, so to say, denatured: as they spread and develop, they gradually recede from their original spirit, and their more popular and spurious elements, their less severe and essential features, those furthest removed from the metaphysical plane come to the fore. While hardly any of the major historical religions have escaped this fate, it would seem that it is particularly true of Buddhism. We need only consider the prevalent notion of the teaching of the prince of the Sakyas that has been formed not only in the West by those who profess admiration for Buddhism, but also for many centuries past in many strata of the peoples of the East.

The terms in which the 2500th anniversary of the death of the Buddha has been commemorated this year, and the way the message that the Buddhist religion should have for the modern world has been spoken of, afford evidence of this.

Someone has recently been able to say: “There is no other alternative: the world today must choose between the H-bomb and the message of the Buddha”—thus identifying that message with pacifism and humanitarianism.

The Western friends of Buddhism have been almost unanimous in appraising it as a sentimental doctrine of love and universal compassion, a doctrine composed of democracy and tolerance, to be admired also for its freedom from dogma, rites, sacraments; almost a sort of secular religion.

It is true that these distortions appeared quite early in the history of Buddhism.

But though it may seem audacious on our part, we have no hesitation in saying that this is a falsification of the message of the Buddha, a degenerated version suited not to virile men, standing with head erect, but to men lying prostrate in search of escape and spiritual alleviation, for whom the law and discipline of a positive religion are too severe.

If we accept the interpretations referred to, Buddhism in its real essence would be a system of ethics rather than a religion in the strict meaning of the term. This character, which some historians of religion had stressed in an attempt to charge Buddhism with supposed inferiority as compared to theistic and dogmatic religions, is today claimed by others as a merit, their claim being based on a misapprehension of a different, but not less serious kind. If Buddhism, taken in its original forms, cannot be called a “religion,” this depends on the fact that it is not below but above the plane of all that can be legitimately defined as “religion,” especially theistic religion. The doctrine of awakening and enlightenment, the essential core of Buddhism, has nothing “religious” about it, because it is preeminently of an “initiatic” or esoteric character, and as such is accessible only to a few elect. It therefore represents not a “broad way” open to all (as in more than one of its aspects, almost in its very name, Mahayana) but a “straight and narrow path” reserved for a minority. This is already made clear by the accounts given in the Canon of the first moment of the enlightenment of the Buddha. When Prince Siddhartha had the revelation of the truth and of the way, the dhamma, he resolved not to spread it, believing it to be inaccessible to

the masses, to ignoble natures immersed in samsara. And so, from the way the story is told, it would seem that only through the mythical intercession of certain divinities the Buddha was induced to change his mind and to consent at last to communicate the possibility of the Great Liberation and the path to attain it.

It is known that in the beginning the Order of the Arya, the noble “sons of the son of the Sakyas,” was restricted, even if not by extrinsic limits. Thus for instance, the Buddha objected to the admission of women. And those who like to see in the attitude of the Buddha towards the conception of caste and the exclusiveness of the Brahmanas, evidence of an egalitarian and universalist spirit, are much mistaken. They confuse that which lies beneath the differences and limits proper to every sound hierarchy (as is the case with democratic egalitarianism, whether social or spiritual) with that which lies above such differentiated structures, as in the case of the truly awakened Buddhist and of the initiate in general. The comparison drawn between the Awakened One and a flower that rises miraculously from a heap of dung is very eloquent on this point, even if it be not edifying to those who indulge in a democratic and humanitarian interpretation of Buddhism.

Considered in the framework of the Hindu situation of his day, the Buddha was a revolutionary only in so much as he opposed to the fictitious and obsolete dignities—corresponding no longer to real qualifications—true dignity, to be shown in each case by works and effective superiority.

Thus, for instance, he maintained the designation of Brahmana, but opposed the type of the real Brahmana to that of the false one.

If in the case of Buddhism one can speak of universalism, this is the universalism of the summits, not the promiscuous one at the base.

The reduction of Buddhism to mere moral teachings appears as the height of absurdity to anyone who remembers the canonical parable of the raft. In no spiritual tradition more than in Buddhism is the purely instrumental and provisional character of morality, of sila, so strongly stressed. As is known, the whole body of moral rules, with good and evil, dhamma and adhamma, was compared by the Buddha to a raft that is built for crossing a river, but which it would be ridiculous to drag along once the crossing has been made.

Contrary to the view, whether philosophical or religious, which ascribes to moral rules an intrinsic, autonomous value (a typical instance of this is the so-called “absolute morality” of Kant’s categorical imperative) the Buddha ascribed to his attitudes of right conduct a purely instrumental value, the value of means justified only in view of a certain aim and therefore only sub conditione. But this end, as are the higher grades of Buddhist asceticism and contemplation, is beyond morality, nor can it be measured by the religious conception of “holiness.” As Milarepa was to say: “In my youth I committed some black deeds, in my maturity some white ones; but now I have rejected all distinctions of black and white.”

Thus, the fact that some of the rules of the sila may perhaps correspond to what the moralists desire, should mislead no one. The spirit inspiring the action in the two cases differs fundamentally. This holds good also for that which the “spiritualists” admire so much in Buddhism: the ethics of love, of compassion, of harmlessness. He who follows the path of awakening cultivates these mental attitudes only as the means to free himself from the bonds of ignorance, of the samsaric ego; not out of sentimental altruism. A conception such as the Western one, expressed by the words “God is love,” and the consequent absolutization of this sentiment, would be an absurdity for the authentic Buddhist doctrine.

Love and compassion are mere details of the opus remotionis, whose aim is a liberation, an enlargement or opening of the soul which can favour, in some cases, the “rupture of the level” and the sudden flash of illumination. Thus, not only is the famous series of the four brahmavihara-bhavana or appamanna, which includes love and compassion, technically and practically equivalent to the several states of a purely “dry” intellectual contemplation, leading to the same goal (the four jhana and the arupa-jhana), but even in the series of brahmavihara-bhavana, the last stage, upakkha, is impassibility, the disincarnate neutrality of a soul that has become free from all sentimentality, from both the bonds of the “I” and the “thou” and shines as a pure light in an ontological super-individual essentiality expressed also in the symbol of the “void,” sunna or sunyata.

We are not the only ones who have noted that this concept of the void is not only affirmed by the Mahayana, but is found already clearly stated in the Canon of early Buddhism. The work proper to Mahayana has been rather that of making this concept the object of a paradoxical philosophical elaboration (paradoxical because this idea corresponds to an absolutely super-rational level detached from philosophy), to which Mahayana added a popular soteriological religion which carried the misdirected interpretation of the precept of compassion to a form that, *inter alia*, leads to a flagrant contradiction in this form of later Buddhism.

In fact, on the one hand, the precept of compassion and love for all beings is announced to such a degree that the Mahayanic Bodhisattva vows that he will not enter nirvana until all living creatures have been redeemed; while on the other hand, according to the Mahayana doctrine of the universal “void,” all these beings are non-existent, so many illusions, mere apparitions of the cosmic dream generated by ignorance. This nonsensical contradiction alone should suggest that to the precept spoken of, and also to the doctrine of universal illusion, a meaning must be given that differs widely from the exoteric, literal, and popular one attributed to them.

Both should be understood on a purely pragmatic plane.

In some aspects of the Mahayana, in which alone the esoteric doctrine of the “awakening” has been replaced by a “religion,” and also in other currents, the essential core of Buddhism has been enveloped by philosophical, mythological, and ritualistic dross and superstructures. When considered in relation to them, so-called “Zen Buddhism” stands for a return to the origins, a reaction in all respects similar to that of early Buddhism itself to degraded Brahmanism. Now,

Zen throws into clear relief the essential value of illumination, its transcendence of all that which, in several cases, may favour it—and at the same time its immanence, that is to say the fact that the state of enlightenment and nirvana does not mean a state of evanescent ecstasy, an escape, so to say, of which compassion is only a pale reflex accompanied by horror of all that is action and affirmation. It is instead a higher form of freedom, a higher dimension. For him who holds fast to it there is no action that cannot be performed, and all bonds are loosened. This is the right interpretation of the doctrine of the void, of the non ego, and also of the Mahayanic conception of the identity of nirvana and samsara in a third principle higher than either, and anterior to both. This should be recalled to those who accept unilaterally the theory of harmlessness, of the timorous respect of all forms of life. As a matter of fact, Zen Buddhism could be called the doctrine of the Samurai, i.e., of the Japanese nobility who are certainly not noted for their abhorrence of arms and bloodshed. The fact is that all this wisdom turns on one pivot alone: the severance of the bond of the ego, the destruction of ignorance, the awakening. When the bond of the ego is severed, all restrictions cease. The fruit the doctrine will bear depends on the human soil on which its seed falls. The humanitarian, pacifist, vegetarian image of the Buddhist is a distortion, and in any case its acceptance is not compulsory.

Samurais and kamikazes may equally well be Buddhists. In a book in which a Buddhist chaplain describes the days of the Japanese put to death by the Americans, we see how these men died without conversion or repentance, in a perfect state of Buddhist grace; men who, if they were not "war criminals" as the victors claimed, were as generals, officials, and politicians certainly not delicate, shy flowers of the field.

Those who have experienced that fundamental inner transformation, that "rupture of the level" which is the essential feature of Buddhist realization, are in possession of an unshakeable calm, an "incomparable certainty" which not even the age of the H-bomb and of all the other devilry of the modern world can disturb. This calm can be preserved above all tragedies and all destructions, even when man's human and ephemeral aspect is involved. Now, it is in this direction rather than in any other that we find the message Buddhism may have for our time. At the conclusion of one of our works, in which we tried to reconstruct the essence of the Buddhist doctrine, we pointed to the dual possibilities it offers.

The first is that of a clear and virile askesis which creates in man firmness and serenity, samatha, by means of a carefully constructed mental practice which allows the detachment and strengthening of a principle that transcends the purely human, irrational, emotional, and, in general, samsaric substance of our being. In no other tradition are these practices taught in such a clear, thorough, we might say scientific form, free from specific religious or ethical implications.

What here is of particular importance is the style of the clear vision, yatha bhutam, which is that of a superior realism, the vision exactly corresponding with reality. A goodly number of gifted men can still make an "immanent" use of Buddhist teachings thus understood. We may even find in them the corrective of the prevalent trends of our day: the religion of life, of struggle, of "becoming," the union with irrational, instinctive, and sub-personal forces that urge man ever

onwards in a “flight towards” (Bernanos), destroying in him all centrality, all real constancy. In an age like ours, samsaric as no other has ever been, the Buddhist system of free and virile askesis as preparation for ultramundane realization might serve to create limits, to provide inner means of defense, to keep at bay the anguish or the rapture felt by those who cling convulsively to the illusory mortal Ego. To repeat, this is not to be understood as an escape, but as a means for assuring a serene and superior security and liberty.

And in view of the times that are approaching, perhaps we have never needed men educated along these lines as much as we do now.

But in the Canons we find juxtaposed to the use of such disciplines for life, the use of them for carrying us “beyond life.” It is here that Buddhism presents itself as the doctrine of awakening, identical with a strict doctrine of initiation, which as such is timeless (akalika), not tied down to historic contingencies, superior to all faiths and all systems of mere devotion. It is not easy for the Westerner to realize what the real purpose of Buddhism is on this level.

The ideal here is absolute unconditional being, the attainment of absolute transcendence. By now the puerile idea of those who identify nirvana with “nothingness,” or regression into the unconsciousness of a trance caused by the distressing knowledge that “life is suffering,” has been to a large extent discarded. Also, the teaching that “life is suffering” belongs only to the exoteric aspect of Buddhism. The deeper meaning of the term dukkha is “commotion,” agitation rather than “suffering”: the condition that the arya, the “noble son,” rejects is that of universal impermanence, of the transitory—a state that should therefore be essentially understood in ontological terms, and whose emotional significance is quite secondary. Its counterpart is thirst, tanha; and the extinction, the nirvana in question, is not destruction in general but precisely and only the destruction of what in our being is thirst, insatiable longing, fever, and attachment, in all its many forms and ramifications. Beyond all this lies awakening and enlightenment, the samadhi which leads to the unconditioned, the immortal.

Perhaps the antithesis between the initiatic notion of “awakening” and the religious and more especially Christian notion of “salvation” or “redemption” has not yet been adequately stressed. The religious conception is based on the assumption that man is a being existentially detached from the sacred and the supernatural. Because of his ontological status as creature, or as the result of original sin, he belongs to the natural order. Only by the intervention of a transcendent power, or on the assumption of man’s “conversion,” or by his faith and his renunciation of his own will, only by Divine action, can he be “saved” and attain to life in “paradise.”

The implications of the concept of “awakening” are entirely different; man is not a fallen or guilty being, nor is he a creature separated by an ontological gulf from a Creator. He is a being who has fallen into a state of sleep, of intoxication, and of “ignorance.” His natural status is that of a Buddha. It is for him to acquire consciousness of this by “awakening.” In opposition to the ideas of conversion, redemption, and action of grace, the principal theme is the destruction of “ignorance” (avijja). Decisive here is a fact of an essentially “noetic” or intellectual, and not

emotional, nature. This confers an indisputable aristocratic character on the doctrine of Buddhism. It ignores the “sin” complex, self abasement, and self-mortification. Its askesis is clear and “dry”; it is alien to the features of auto-sadism or masochism which are always present in the forms of the asceticism better known to the West, and which have often given rise among Westerners to anti-ascetic prejudice and a distorted exaltation of life.

This character of loftiness, which is founded in Buddhist ontology, is matched by the Buddhist doctrine of autonomy: man is the free master of his own destiny.

He alone is responsible for what he is. Thus, in conformity with his vocation, he can affirm the state he is in, or he can change it. There are no penalties and no rewards; therefore, there is nothing to hope for and nothing to fear. The only thing that must be taken into consideration is the objective, unsentimental, extra moral connection of cause and effect. If a Buddha sets himself free, it is by his own efforts alone. On the path leading to awakening, no external aid is to be sought. This conception, on which the traditional Hindu notion of karma was already founded, is particularly stressed by Buddhism. The historical Buddha, as is well known, did not present himself as a divine saviour, but as a man who, after attaining enlightenment and the Great Liberation by himself, indicates the path to those having a like vocation. All this refers to early Buddhism. With Mahayanic Buddhism in its prevailing and popular aspects, we descend once more to the level of the soteriological religions; innumerable Bodhisattvas and Buddhas busy themselves to insure the salvation and happiness of all living beings.

Again, if we turn to the terminus ad quem, to the ultimate ideal of Buddhism, the break with religious conceptions is a clear one, and it is difficult for Westerners to fully grasp. In the West we are accustomed to consider paradise as a religious ideal, the survival of the believer in heaven, and only a few mystics speak of the unitive life, of union with Being. But the Buddhist doctrine looks on all this as trivial and leaves it behind. Its horizon is that of the traditional Hindu metaphysics, which considers the divine worlds as themselves belonging to samsara, and immortality not as the perpetuation of individuality but as the realization of the Unconditioned. Nor is Being the supreme point, that beyond which nothing other is conceivable. Being is matched by Non-Being, and the Unconditioned is that which is superior and anterior to both. In a well-known passage the Buddha rejects and condemns one by one all the identifications: identification with the body, with the elements, with the Ego, with the cosmos, with the divine hierarchies, even with the God of Being, that is to say with Brahma. In a speech which is Michaelangelesque in its grandeur, identification with the God of Being, which is equivalent to the unio mystica, the ultimate limit of religious rapture, is rejected in terms that see it almost as a diabolical temptation, for it would represent a limit to the great Liberation, to the attainment of the Unconditioned.

He who has a knowledge of these dimensions of the Buddhist experience, dimensions that appear clearly in the canonical texts, what can he think of those who consider Buddhism to be not even a religion but a system of sickly sentimental secular morality, consisting of humanitarianism and indiscriminate love, the pale evanescent wisdom of those who have recognized that the “world is

suffering”? Undoubtedly, the metaphysical dimensions of Buddhism just discussed can only be understood, let alone reached, by very few. But this is indeed the ultimate background of the whole system. The canonical saying goes: “All the waters of the ocean have but one flavour, that of salt; so the sense of the whole of the Law is only one, that of liberation.”

For the ultimate, the great nirvana, or more correctly, the “void,” the sunna, the Buddha uses the method of the so-called “negative theology”; it is unnamable, indefinable, incomprehensible to the human mind; one can only say what it is not, not what it is, for one cannot even apply to it the category of Being. But how to ignore what may be called the traces, the marks of Him who has no marks? Because “the lord of men and gods” was called the perfect “awakened One.” As “unconquered and intact beings,” similar to “lofty Overmen,” appear those who have travelled along this path; like lions in whom both anguish and terror are dead.

They see the past, they see the heavens and the infernal regions, They know this world and the world beyond, the kingdom of death and the kingdom free from death, the temporal and the eternal. They are “like tigers, like bulls in a mountain cave” though they appear as “beings free from vanity, who have appeared in the world for the good of many, for the health of many, for compassion of the world, for the good, the profit, and the health of men and gods.”

“I have passed beyond the brambles of opinions, I have acquired power over myself, I have reached the path, I possess the knowledge, I have none who guide me,” says the Awakened One of Himself. He is the “daring One who never hesitates, the sure guide, free from passion, bright as the sunlight, free from pride, heroic”; he is the “One who knows, who is dazzled by no fevers, overcome by no troubles, tempted by no victories, stained by no stains”; He is “the great being who lives apart, freed from all ties, no longer slave to any servitude”; He is the “worthy One who keeps watch over Himself, of steady step, ready for the announcement,” “inclined to none and disinclined towards none, sublime in soul, powerful, impassible”; He is “the One whom no thirst burns, no smoke dims, and no mist wets; a spirit who honours sacrifice and who rises up majestically as does no other.”

Passions, pride, falsehood have fallen away from Him like mustard seeds from the point of a needle. Beyond good, beyond evil, he has cast off both chains, and detached from both pain and pleasure he is purified. Since He knows, He no longer inquires: “How so?” He has reached the bottom of the element free from death. He has left the human bond and the divine bond and has freed Himself from all bonds; no one in the world can conquer Him, who has for his domain the infinite and whose path is known neither by the gods nor by angels, nor by ordinary men.

Notwithstanding the hyperbolical element in some of these attributes, an ideal type takes definite shape from them against a background of grandeur and spiritual virility which it would be hard to find in any other tradition, in comparison to which the religious value of “sanctity” is pale and flaccid. Judged by this standard, far from being a doctrine accessible to all, a doctrine that makes things easy for the “spiritualists” because it has no dogma and no rites and is free from exclusivities, the Buddhist path of awakening is a narrow one reserved for those who possess an

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exceptional vocation and qualifications. In following it, it may be said that the saying of the Katha Upanishad is also applicable: it is like walking on a razor's edge without help, either human or divine.

It is agreed that wisdom of this kind cannot be "popularized." Indeed, it should not even be indiscriminately communicated, for it is not without risk. The Canon itself speaks of the consequences of the doctrine if wrongly interpreted: it is like one who, having seized a serpent in the wrong way, sees it pounce on him, causing death or mortal pain. The doctrine stands out and remains a summit, bearing witness to what a superior humanity could conceive. As to the forms in which Buddhism has become a religion *sui generis*, and, worse still, as to those forms in which it is conceived and appreciated as a democratizing humanitarian morality, they should be rightly considered as an unmitigated contamination of the truth.

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The Techniques of Endogenous Transmutation in Kundalini-Yoga and Taoism

A distinction like the one we have just made is also necessary in the sphere of yoga itself. In contrast to asceticism and mysticism, yoga is an exact science of techniques for controlling processes in the service of specific ends. Yoga is in essence, however, a secret doctrine for which the principle of direct transmission is the rule; and so, although a great deal has been published about it and many classical texts have been translated in the West in recent years, it is not always easy to glean an adequate understanding of some fundamental points of its teachings.

Yoga, especially in its Tibetan adaptation, seems to have envisaged and taught a transformation of sexual force in the generic sense of ojas. This is certainly at issue when tum-mo or "mystical heat" is spoken of as an energy that can also produce extranormal phenomena of a physical and physiological nature.⁶

In the same way, when this heat is assigned the function of arousing the kundalini, it is obviously only an aid or an instrument. But it is better to refer to the actual Hindu teachings of Tantric kundalini yoga, where a clearer doctrinal picture of the whole can be found.

The field of yoga in Tantrism is separate from that of the sexual practices we shall detail later on, in the sense of two paths that may lead to the same goal but are applicable to men of different gifts and viewpoints in their most profound nature.

Whether the path of yoga that excludes woman is recommended, or instead the one that includes her, will depend on the predominance of sattva (the luminous principle of "being") or rajas (the principle of excitability, transport, and fire or passion in the individual aspirant). The two human types based on these principles are also called the spiritual (divine or divya) type and the heroic (virya) type respectively; both of them equally tread the path of Shiva and are distinguished from the person who restricts himself to the ritualistic practice of traditional religion.

The spirit of Tantric yoga itself is characterized best by these words from a text: “What need have I of an external woman? I have a woman within me.”⁷ This alludes to the female principle contained in the depths of a man’s being which corresponds to “our Diana,” to “Eve,” and to “secret Hebe” of Western Hermetism. According to Tantrism, this Goddess is present in the human organism itself in the form of an elementary force which is given the name of “she who is wrapped” (this is the meaning of the word kundalini). This yoga, therefore, considers an inner process; the union of male with female and the surmounting thereby of the Dyad are carried out in one’s own body without recourse to another individual of the opposite sex as an embodiment and living symbol of the opposite principle.

Hyperphysical physiology now comes into play with its subtle forces and elements acting behind the material structure of the organism and below the threshold of normal waking consciousness. Two streams of vital energy, called ida and pingala, which normally run in coils on both sides of the backbone, one linked to the negative, female, lunar principle and the other to the positive, male, solar principle, play an important role.

They are manifestations and analogues of the Dyad or elementary polarity in the human body. A yogi can divert these streams by certain strenuous techniques, preventing them from following their two lateral, winding directions and making them flow together. This diversion and union bring about a closure of circuit that can lead to the awakening of the kundalini.

We said that the kundalini represents the Goddess or primordial Shakti within man for the followers of Tantrism. It is the “dazzling” life force which has organized the body and continues to dwell there secretly as the root of all the subtle, vital currents in the body. It is called “she who is wrapped” to indicate that in ordinary human existence its true nature is invisible; it “sleeps” in a subtle center located at the base of the spine. There is an essential relationship between the expression of thoughts, the fire of desire, and the sexual functions.⁸

As the potential bride of the primordial male, the kundalini is expressed by the symbolism of a serpent wound around the lingam or phallus of Shiva in the lowest centre. When the streams on the two sides are halted, the kundalini awakens and “unwinds” itself.

A change of polarity in the basic life force of man then occurs, and the kundalini flows upward, running along an axial “duct” up the line of the backbone, called the sushumna (it is also called the “path of Shakti” and, in Buddhist Tantrism, “the path of nirvana”).

From its original seat in the profane, the kundalini goes upward to the top of the head. A fiery nature is attributed by analogy to the aroused force, and therefore some texts describe its arousal and ascent in terms of a fire that burns everything it meets and eliminates all conditional qualities. In this respect we may speak of the sushumna as the dazzling path of unity inasmuch as the ascent occurs under the sign of an advancing union of the male and female, the union being made perfect and absolute at the end of the path of the sushumna at the top of the head.

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Here there is the excessus; Shiva and Shakti, the god and goddess embrace and are united; there is complete fusion and resolution of the shakti principle in the shiva principle, equivalent to the Great Liberation, the transcendental reintegration, the surmounting of the dual state and, in general, of the cosmic bond.

References to the organism in this should not make us think of processes that are exhausted within the individual physical structure. The body in Tantrism is “made cosmic” and is conceived of in terms of principles and powers that also act in the world and in nature in accordance with the traditional correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm.

Thus the ascent of the kundalini in a yogi involves a set of supersensual experiences and a passage through the “elements” (as in the ancient mysteries) and also through manifold states of being symbolized in various ways according to different schools and, in this particular yoga, linked to various centers arranged along the axial path and awakened by the kundalini as it contacts them.⁹

In this type of yoga, the key to the whole process is the arousal of the basic energy, which also continues to be the operational power until the final resolution. Speaking of the relationship that this force has to the sex urge and animal generation in a normal man, a text states that this force, the kundalini, produces slavery in the ignorant and freedom in the yogi.¹⁰ There is obviously a twofold polarity. From the change in polarity arises the mystery of transmutation and awakening. The texts speak openly of a saving of the force of the seed, the virya, of the “backward practice” (ujana sadhana) and of the “causing of an upward flow” (urdhvaretas).¹¹ The operation of “causing the seed to flow upward” was mentioned in the Upanishads (cf. Maitri-Upanishad VI, 33; Mahanarayani- Upanishad XII, I) as well as in hatha yoga in general.

In the Dhyana-bindu-Upanishad (86), we read, “He in whose body the seed remains need not fear death,” and in the “Chandilya-Upanishad” it is written, “Either we succeed in overcoming the bindu or the Yoga fails,” bindu being one of the words to describe the force of the seed or the virya. According to Tantric teachings and symbolism, as long as the kundalini sleeps, it stops access to the central path of sushumna, which is the same as saying that the force oriented to normal sexuality forms an obstacle for the process that should lead to initiatory rebirth instead of animal generation. In this way, the sleeping kundalini is also represented as blocking the opening of Shiva’s phallus, so that the seed of rebirth on high cannot be emitted. On the other hand, it is said that when vital energy no longer runs along the two lines on the sides, as happens in the ordinary existence of a normal man, but, with the obstruction removed, enters the central duct or sushumna, the conditional quality of the time is suspended and “the fire of death blazes”; that is, a rupture of level takes place equivalent to the crisis that in many traditions is generally called “initiatory death.” “You who ascend like a streak of lightning,” says a hymn of the Goddess, who is manifested in this.¹²

Therefore, it is natural that the practices in question should not be free from grave perils; the texts say that he who awakens the kundalini without the necessary skill and the knowledge of a true yogi may meet not only serious disturbances but even madness and death (actual death, not initiatory death). Therefore, the strictest disciplines of self-control, mental concentration, and purification are the indispensable precondition for kundalini yoga. Only a man who has realized in himself his true nature as Shiva is capable of not being overthrown when he arouses, exposes, and activates the Goddess. One text, in fact, gives the symbolism of a widow (who represents the force in its state of separation from the One during the descending phase, bereft of its counterpart, the male principle) seated by two rivers, which represent the two streams (ida and pingala, which in the human framework reflect the principle of the Dyad), violently stripped and possessed, the text tells us. She will then lead to the highest seat.¹³

Kundalini yoga extensively uses a technique of breathing linked to special magical positions of the body (asana). A system of breathing, which includes the total cessation of breathing, facilitates the desired diversion of the subtle energies.

Given the scope of this book, we must limit our discussion of kundalini yoga to this brief sketch and direct our readers for further information to the book of ours cited earlier. We have referred to this yoga as an outstanding and well-attested example of the “endogenous” method that has rigorous chastity as a prerequisite. It arouses the force that woman bears and embodies in the conditioned world, that is, the Shakti, in the form of the kundalini; in the same way, within a yogi the magical coitus and marriage to the divinity are realized after preliminary ascetic discipline has led him to realize the opposite principle, the principle of the absolute or transcendental male, the Shiva nature or the Vajradhara (Bearer of the Scepter), according to the Tibetan name.

The mystery of transmutation is found in other secret traditions as well.

Taoism knows of it, and the alchemy of both the East and West often alludes to its techniques, as well as to the problematical transmutation of metallic substances, by means of a symbolic jargon. Precisely because of the potential polyvalence belonging to all esoteric symbolism, the outline of the fundamental operations in alchemical hermetism can admit an interpretation in terms of sexual techniques as well. However, such an interpretation is not the only one, nor is it a binding one; indeed, with the possible exception of Nicola Flamel, no information has come down to us from the golden period of this tradition concerning teachers who worked on this plane with the assistance of women. Later we shall refer to that interpretation only from a secondary point of view by considering some evidence in modern writers who have made use of hermetic symbolism in relation to these realizations. The interpretation of the opus transformationis in merely initiatory terms instead falls outside our subject; however, we treated it in full in another book.¹⁴

As regards the operational Taoism of the Far East, it is necessary to make the same distinction as in the case of Tantrism, for here, too, a kind of endogenous transmutation of the yoga type is contrasted with a category of explicitly sexual practices; we shall come back to the latter shortly. As regards the former, there are not always explicit references to sexuality as the raw material for the transmutation. We shall therefore restrict ourselves to a brief note on the basis of the teachings contained in a rather late text, the Tai I Chin hua Tsung Chih, which has been translated in some European languages as "The Secret of the Golden Flower,"¹⁵ by reason of some interesting likenesses between it and kundalini yoga.

This Taoist text also starts with the primordial duality, of the yang and yin, which is present in each individual and not in two separate persons of opposite sexes. In man the yang or male principle is present in the form of the luminous hun element situated in the head and precisely between the two eyes. The yin or female principle is present, instead, in the form of the obscure p'o element located in the lower part of the body in an area called the "space of the force," and this brings us back again to the idea of the female as Shakti. In Chinese teachings the duality is also indicated as that of the hsing and ming, words meaning "being" and "life," which refer to one of the most essential aspects of the Great Dyad. It is said that with the birth of individual existence, "being and life are separated and see each other no more from that moment onward," naturally, wherever the initiatory procedures described in the text do not take place, procedures which have the purpose of leading the centre of the human being back to the Great Pole (t'ai chi) or "Great One" or "State without Duality" (wu chi), which takes back to itself both the being and life, the yang and the yin.

The condition of an ordinary man is that of a being in whom "the centre is no longer defended" and where the female yin principle (also called the "lower soul") subjects the male yang principle (also called the "higher soul"), compelling it to serve her and directing it outward. This outward direction is called "straight and irreversible" (like someone who is thrust irresistibly forward) and involves the dispersion and dissipation of vital energy and of the "original seed." The starting point for reintegration, therefore, is an action intended to turn energy back upon itself and "to make the light circulate" (or crystallize), and for this purpose systems of spiritual concentration are required (the so-called fixed contemplation or chih kuari) together with breathing exercises, as in yoga. When the change of direction has been brought about, the straight outward compulsion is stopped and replaced with a backward movement and thereafter with a movement of "rotation"; then other systems tend to make the consciousness descend to the "space of the force."

At this point the rupture of level and the union of the two opposed principles take place, with the final meaning, however, of a "distillation of the yin in pure yang." To the restoration of the original state "without duality," which is also called the "sprouting of the Flower of Gold," is linked the birth of the kuei, a word that can be translated as "active divine being." Observe that the Chinese character kuei also means lightning; we noted earlier the relationship established in other traditions between the mystery of reintegration, the number three, and lightning.

Taking possession of the “original seed” and withholding it are a central theme in such teachings. But in this text only a few scanty allusions can lead us to believe that this seed is the equivalent of the Hindu virya and therefore has a specific reference to the secret force of manhood, which is normally received by a woman when the male seed runs onto her innermost flesh in the act of love. At one point the fundamental principle of sexual magic is actually expressed, namely the principle of the transmutation, into a beneficial thing, of that which in itself should have a toxic character, when it is said, “Here we allude to the sexual union of man with woman from which sons and daughters are born.

The madman squanders the most precious jewel of his body in unbridled pleasures and knows not how to save his seminal energy, with the exhaustion of which the body collapses.

Those who are learned have no way of conserving their life other than by eliminating pleasure and conserving their seed.”¹⁶ Here the end purpose is the prolongation of existence symbolized in the alchemic elixirs of long life (a recurring theme in Taoism also), rather than the initiatory reintegration of the being. In relating the alleged use of women to obtain the elixir by P’eng, an ancient teacher, the text states that this did not involve actual sexual copulation but the union and sublimation of the two principles, that of the crystallized light, yang, and that of the wet force, yin. Therefore, these teachings refer to the plane of endogenous processes, on which the mystery of transmutation is fulfilled directly within a single being (“in one single vessel,” to use the expression of hermetism) and not in operations to be conducted in copulation with a woman (“operation with two vessels”). We shall write shortly about more ancient Taoist texts wherein this second possibility is, instead, considered openly; in their case, however, the doctrinal assumptions are not different from those just indicated in referring to the teachings of the Secret of the Golden Flower.

On the Secret of Degeneration

Anyone who has come to reject the rationalist myth of "progress" and the interpretation of history as an unbroken positive development of mankind will find himself gradually drawn towards the world-view that was common to all the great traditional cultures, and which had at its centre the memory of a process of degeneration, slow obscuration, or collapse of a higher preceding world. As we penetrate deeper into this new (and old) interpretation, we encounter various problems, foremost among which is the question of the secret of degeneration.

In its literal sense, this question is by no means a novel one. While contemplating the magnificent remains of cultures whose very name has not even come down to us, but which seem to have conveyed, even in their physical material, a greatness and power that is more than earthly, scarcely anyone has failed to ask themselves questions about the death of cultures, and sensed the inadequacy of the reasons that are usually given to explain it.

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We can thank the Comte de Gobineau for the best and best-known summary of this problem, and also for a masterly criticism of the main hypotheses about it. His solution on the basis of racial thought and racial purity also has a lot of truth in it, but it needs to be expanded by a few observations concerning a higher order of things.

For there have been many cases in which a culture has collapsed even when its race has remained pure, as is especially clear in certain groups that have suffered slow, inexorable extinction despite remaining as racially isolated as if they were islands. An example quite close at hand is the case of the Swedes and the Dutch. These people are in the same racial condition today as they were two centuries ago, but there is little to be found now of the heroic disposition and the racial awareness that they once possessed. Other great cultures seem merely to have remained standing in the condition of mummies: they have long been inwardly dead, so that it takes only the slightest push to knock them down. This was the case, for example, with ancient Peru, that giant solar empire which was annihilated by a few adventurers drawn from the worst rabble of Europe.

If we look at the secret of degeneration from the exclusively traditional point of view, it becomes even harder to solve it completely. It is then a matter of the division of all cultures into two main types. On the one hand there are the traditional cultures, whose principle is identical and unchangeable, despite all the differences evident on the surface.

The axis of these cultures and the summit of their hierarchical order consists of metaphysical, supra-individual powers and actions, which serve to inform and justify everything that is merely human, temporal, subject to becoming and to "history." On the other hand there is "modern culture," which is actually the anti-tradition and which exhausts itself in a construction of purely human and earthly conditions and in the total development of these, in pursuit of a life entirely detached from the "higher world."

From the standpoint of the latter, the whole of history is degeneration, because it shows the universal decline of earlier cultures of the traditional type, and the decisive and violent rise of a new universal civilization of the "modern" type. A double question arises from this.

First, how was it ever possible for this to come to pass? There is a logical error underlying the whole doctrine of evolution: it is impossible that the higher can emerge from the lower, and the greater from the less. But doesn't a similar difficulty face us in the solution of the doctrine of involution? How is it ever possible for the higher to fall? If we could make do with simple analogies, it would be easy to deal with this question. A healthy man can become sick; a virtuous one can turn to vice. There is a natural law that everyone takes for granted: that every living being starts with birth, growth, and strength, then come old age, weakening, and disintegration. And so forth. But this is just making statements, not explaining, even if we allow that such analogies actually relate to the question posed here.

Secondly, it is not only a matter of explaining the possibility of the degeneration of a particular cultural world, but also the possibility that the degeneration of one cultural cycle may pass to

other peoples and take them down with it. For example, we have not only to explain how the ancient Western reality collapsed, but also have to show the reason why it was possible for "modern" culture to conquer practically the whole world, and why it possessed the power to divert so many peoples from any other type of culture, and to hold sway even where states of a traditional kind seemed to be alive (one need only recall the Aryan East).

In this respect, it is not enough to say that we are dealing with a purely material and economic conquest. That view seems very superficial, for two reasons. In the first place, a land that is conquered on the material level also experiences, in the long run, influences of a higher kind corresponding to the cultural type of its conqueror. We can state, in fact, that European conquest almost everywhere sows the seeds of "Europeanization," i.e., the "modern" rationalist, tradition hostile, individualistic way of thinking. Secondly, the traditional conception of culture and the state is hierarchical, not dualistic. Its bearers could never subscribe, without severe reservations, to the principles of "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" and "My kingdom is not of this world." For us, "Tradition" is the victorious and creative presence in the world of that which is "not of this world," i.e., of the Spirit, understood as a power that is mightier than any merely human or material one.

This is a basic idea of the authentically traditional view of life, which does not permit us to speak with contempt of merely material conquests. On the contrary, the material conquest is the sign, if not of a spiritual victory, at least of a spiritual weakness or a kind of spiritual "retreat" in the cultures that are conquered and lose their independence. Everywhere that the Spirit, regarded as the stronger power, was truly present, it never lacked for means- visible or otherwise- to enable all the opponent's technical and material superiority to be resisted. But this has not happened. It must be concluded, then, that degeneracy was lurking behind the traditional facade of every people that the "modern" world has been able to conquer. The West must then have been the culture in which a crisis that was already universal assumed its acutest form. There the degeneration amounted, so to speak, to a knockout blow, and as it took effect, it brought down with more or less ease other peoples in whom the involution had certainly not "progressed" as far, but whose tradition had already lost its original power, so that these peoples were no longer able to protect themselves from an outside assault.

With these considerations, the second aspect of our problem is traced back to the first one. It is mainly a question of explicating the meaning and the possibility of degeneracy, without reference to other circumstances.

For this we must be clear about one thing: it is an error to assume that the hierarchy of the traditional world is based on a tyranny of the upper classes. That is merely a "modern" conception, completely alien to the traditional way of thinking. The traditional doctrine in fact conceived of spiritual action as an "action without acting"; it spoke of the "unmoved mover"; everywhere it used the symbolism of the "pole," the unalterable axis around which every ordered movement takes place (and elsewhere we have shown that this is the meaning of the swastika, the "arctic cross"); it always stressed the "Olympian," spirituality, and genuine authority, as well

as its way of acting directly on its subordinates, not through violence but through "presence"; finally, it used the simile of the magnet, wherein lies the key to our question, as we shall now see.

Only today could anyone imagine that the authentic bearers of the Spirit, or of Tradition, pursue people so as to seize them and put them in their places- in short, that they "manage" people, or have any personal interest in setting up and maintaining those hierarchical relationships by virtue of which they can appear visibly as the rulers.

This would be ridiculous and senseless. It is much more the recognition on the part of the lower ones that is the true basis of any traditional ranking. It is not the higher that needs the lower, but the other way round. The essence of hierarchy is that there is something living as a reality in certain people, which in the rest is only present in the condition of an ideal, a premonition, an unfocused effort. Thus the latter are fatefully attracted to the former, and their lower condition is one of subordination less to something foreign, than to their own true "self." Herein lies the secret, in the traditional world, of all readiness for sacrifice, all heroism, all loyalty; and, on the other side, of a prestige, an authority, and a calm power which the most heavily armed tyrant can never count upon.

With these considerations, we have come very close to solving not only the problem of degeneration, but also the possibility of a particular fall. Are we perhaps not tired of hearing that the success of every revolution indicates the weakness and degeneracy of the previous rulers? An understanding of this kind is very one-sided. This would indeed be the case if wild dogs were tied up, and suddenly broke loose: that would be proof that the hands holding their leashes had become impotent or weak. But things are arranged very differently in the framework of spiritual ranking, whose real basis we have explained above. This hierarchy degenerates and is able to be overthrown in one case only: when the individual degenerates, when he uses his fundamental freedom to deny the Spirit, to cut his life loose from any higher reference-point, and to exist "only for himself."

Then the contacts are fatefully broken, the metaphysical tension, to which the traditional organism owes its unity, gives way, every force wavers in its path and finally breaks free. The peaks, of course, remain pure and inviolable in their heights, but the rest, which depended on them, now becomes an avalanche, a mass that has lost its equilibrium and falls, at first imperceptibly but with ever accelerating movement down to the depths and lowest levels of the valley. This is the secret of every degeneration and revolution. The European had first slain the hierarchy in himself by extirpating his own inner possibilities, to which corresponded the basis of the order that he would then destroy externally.

If Christian mythology attributes the Fall of Man and the Rebellion of the Angels to the freedom of the will, then it comes to much the same significance. It concerns the frightening potential that dwells in man of using freedom to destroy spiritually and to banish everything that could ensure him a supra-natural value. This is a metaphysical decision: the stream that traverses history in the

most varied forms of the traditional-hating, revolutionary, individualistic, and humanistic spirit, or in short, the "modern" spirit. This decision is the only positive and decisive cause in the secret of degeneration, the destruction of Tradition.

If we understand this, we can perhaps also grasp the sense of those legends that speak of mysterious rulers who "always" exist and have never died (shades of the Emperor sleeping beneath the Kyffhäuser mountain!). Such rulers can be rediscovered only when one achieves spiritual completeness and awakens a quality in oneself like that of a metal that suddenly feels "the magnet", finds the magnet and irresistibly orients itself and moves towards it. For now, we must restrict ourselves to this hint. A comprehensive explanation of legends of that sort, which come to us from the most ancient Aryan source, would take us too far. At another opportunity we will perhaps return to the secret of reconstruction, to the "magic" that is capable of restoring the fallen mass to the unalterable, lonely, and invisible peaks that are still there in the heights.

Race as a Builder of Leaders

In our previous article in the Diorama, we wondered whether, besides the general applications of racial and national hygiene, and, naturally, the defence of our genetic heritage against cross-breeding and hybridisation, the doctrine of race should be limited to being a matter of 'teaching' or, in our country, should sooner or later become the basis of a true 'education', with special tasks of a spiritual and political nature with respect to a certain racial elite. In other words, it must be wondered whether, at home, given similar necessities, we should undertake projects similar to those of German National Socialism, which, despite its being of more recent development than Italian Fascism, have already taken concrete shape, such as their setting up of the Adolf Hitler Schule, of the cadets of the Order Ordensburger, of the S.S. corps and its schools for leaders and with the national Politische HermeHunganstante. In fact all these German institutions show a definite intention to proceed to a political selection, in which racial considerations must have a fundamental role and the value of a real formative force.

The Future Leading Class

In general, it must be acknowledged that the problem of the future ruling class is one of the most essential ones for the movements of restorative nature: it can be postponed in the first stages of the struggle for the conquest of power and of consolidation against external enemies, but, in a second phase, it must be tackled in order to perpetuate and stabilise that organism that the manifestation of 'the men of destiny' has created. Far from being confined to the sphere of academia or from exhausting itself in cultural and propagandistic forms, the doctrine of race should thus contribute to the achievement of such a task. Of course, the prerequisite, here, is that such doctrine is understood in a global manner, and is therefore not limited to the biological and anthropological sphere ('racism of first degree'), but is led also to consider race as a reality of the soul, of the character and of the way of life, and, finally, race as 'world-outlook' and race of the spirit ('racism of second and third degree').

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Every kind of indiscriminate ethnic adulteration, on the one hand, is the consequence of a degenerated inner sensibility and of the tyranny of materialistic, individualistic and sentimental considerations, and, on the other hand, is the cause of the further degeneration of peoples and civilizations; this must be borne in mind. Precise considerations of 'racism of first degree' should thus not be neglected in the creation of a new ruling class, and, certainly, as things stand at present, in Italy above all, it is not impossible that physical appearances peculiar to a given race may be accompanied by the psychic traits of a different race. It cannot be disputed, however, that, except in exceptional cases, when the research and the subsequent selection is restricted to a sphere defined by the correspondence to this racial physical type that we consider as higher, namely the Nordic Aryan, we are more likely to find corresponding spiritual qualities than we would through haphazard research, which ignored this physical racial typology and this sign of a heredity and of an origin, maybe buried, but unlikely to be completely extinct, which a relative racial purity in a physical and anthropological sense constitutes. And the advantages of the effects of the action of prestige and of visible exemplars cannot be ignored, whenever heads, leaders, have, physically, a particular virile presence, are in the common sense of the expression, 'well bred' rather than small bespectacled, ill-favoured, mongrelised men.

Further Selections

Once, by means of the racism of first degree, a given sphere and a first selection are identified, we should proceed, through the racism of second and third degree, to further tests, in an exploration of deeper and more essential qualities than those of the outer appearance. A definite characteristic of the current renovative movements is their anti-intellectualism or, if you prefer, their anti-rationalism. Such movements are pervaded with heroic and active forces, irreducible to abstract reason. One of the decisive tasks for our future will be that of connecting the myths of such movements with a blood instinct: certain ideas and expressions, which are a 'driving force' only in that they have a suggestive power on the national masses, must find a mode of expression that, at least in an elite, relates organically to race and tradition in the deepest sense, so as to differentiate the ideas of our movement from the collectivist expressions and myths that can sometimes exert the same power on masses, but are a complete denial of everything that stands for stock, tradition, fatherland.

We therefore think of a selection of the second stage, to be carried out by means of a precise and repeated close examination of the political sensitivity within a group that would have already met the requirements of the physical racial selection. It would involve examining, here, to what extent the root ideas of the Fascist revolution could really speak to the blood, so as to be translated into a deeper reality than what proceeds either from common sense or from a confused enthusiasm. Those who succeed in proving, through appropriate tests, an adequate capacity with regard to this, to be developed and strengthened with appropriate disciplines, could be entrusted with positions of high political importance, with what would be called in Germany 'die Ueberwachung der national- socialistischen Weltanschauung' ('supervision of the National Socialist world view'). Just as the Church set up, in its own field, a Holy Office with the mission

of supervising all that is related to orthodoxy, the elite in question, on the basis of its Fascist instinct and its racial awareness, should control all that, in the Italian culture, is related, directly or indirectly, to the principles that condition the Fascist renewal and are at the root of its development. One of its tasks would be to undertake a cultural purification and improvement. It must be seen to that, at home, tasks of vital importance do not sink into the bureaucratic swamp and into mere measures understood and carried out to the letter, but not to the spirit, which, in such a sensitive and differentiated field, is the essential thing.

Towards a New 'Order'

In Germany the most serious and concrete attempt to create an elite is constituted by the above-mentioned S.S. corps (abbreviation of Schutz Staffel). It is interesting that Heinrich Himmler, head of this corps, which may be called 'Guard and Order of the Nazi Revolution', is at the same time head of the Secret State Police (Gestapo) and that other leaders under his command have similar positions. Notably, Himmler along with his entire corps are answerable directly and solely to Hitler. What we learn from this is the necessity that the concept of 'police' go beyond the narrow scope that was one's own in the old democratic and positivist State, in which it had only to do with delinquents and, at most, with subversives in the most narrow and direct sense of the word. The new totalitarian State represents an organism which must defend itself against not only true lesions, but also against every subtle infiltration, everything that may weaken it and facilitate the action of germs and toxins. What is needed, in these respects, is an action that is not only defensive, but also preventive and counter-offensive. In this connection, the tasks that become apparent do not have much to do with some paragraph of the penal code or other. They require rather a subtle action of surveillance and of protection, which considers the moral and spiritual as very important and has the nature of a Holy Office in the best sense more than it has the nature of a 'police', because of the awareness that the true power of revolution lies in the vision of the world and in its great fundamental ideas and that their distortion or their weakening would also herald a fatal decline of the party-political organism in the narrow sense of the term. In this field too, it is evident that nothing would be more lethal and ineffective than bureaucratism, nothing more essential than a subtle sensitivity, a racial sensitivity, an instinct able to develop even in areas bordering on the occult.

Since our attention was justly drawn to the document known as 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion', we must ask whether the difficulties of the task of forming elements that can be at least equal in their capabilities to the secret leaders of world subversion and would know all their instruments can afford to be in any way under-estimated. Considering this, we can see what importance this idea of a racial-spiritual elite to which we devoted the previous considerations must have. As it develops, it could be allowed to grow beyond the mere national field and even that of an organisation such as the famous Intelligence Service, carrying out tasks that, since they are currently limited to their own national area, remain potentials only even in the National-Socialist S.S. itself. That is to say that, in this way, it is possible to rise to the idea of a Military

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Order, in the ancient, medieval sense, which is also spiritual, constructed to defend tradition and to attack the enemy in all its forms, visible and invisible, wherever it is and whatever disguise, social, political, cultural or even scientific, it assumes: in short, the positive counterpart of the solidarity of the world-wide conspiracy and international front of subversion.

Naturally, before getting to that stage, a long period of training, selection and internal and external, political and social organization of the elite in question will be needed. At this stage, however, the main thing is to become aware of the requirements and to set down the principle: to go beyond the generic, political, propagandistic and popular stage of racial awareness, to arrive at the constructive, serious, discriminating and educative stage by setting up appropriate institutions and entrusting with precise responsibilities those who possess by historical good fortune suitable qualifications to lead, with more than just words or theories, what could really be called a seminar of future leaders.

What Tantrism Means to Modern to Western Civilization

One

One of the characteristics of the Hindu doctrine that may be described in a general way as Tantrism is its claim to offer a formulation of the traditional doctrine that is only suitable to the last epoch of the present cycle, i.e., for the Kali Yuga. Notwithstanding its importance, it was little known in the West up to a short time ago. It is said that teachings, rituals, sciences, which might have been suitable during the primordial age (Satya Yuga) are no longer suitable for a humanity living in later epochs, especially in the “dark age.”

Therefore, such a humanity can find, not in the Vedas or in other ancient texts, but in the Tantras and the Agamas, the knowledge and the efficient technique allowing it to attain the supreme goal of man: freedom from every form of conditioned existence. Thus the Tantras often present themselves as a “fifth Veda”—as a further revelation corresponding to the present phase of manifestation. They further state that former rituals have become as inefficient as “a snake deprived of its venom” inasmuch as the prevailing qualification (adhikara) in man has undergone a complete change.¹

However, such a point of view is not valid only in the spiritual “space” of Hindu civilization and tradition, because the doctrine of the four ages has, so to speak, a general validity. There are Western doctrines that correspond to the Hindu formulation of this doctrine.

It is in fact sufficiently clear that the last phase (“the iron age” in Western terminology) bears all the signs of modern civilization, the 1 With reference to all this, see for example: Mahanirvana Tantra, I, 19; II, 7, 14; IV, 47; Tarapradipa, 1; Shiva Shiandra: Tantratattva, trans. into English by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga (London: Luzac & Co., 1919).

1:center of which is the West.

2:As things are, one may be led to consider the extent to which the “relevance” claimed by Tantrism has a certain objective basis, particularly regarding Western Civilization.

Two

Historically, Tantrism is connected with a characteristic revolution that began in India towards the middle of the first millennium BC.

Since that time, certain divine female figures—Shakti—rise to ever growing importance, accompanying Hindu deities which in the Aryan period appeared as isolated and, in several cases, even obtaining an advantage over them. Shaktism is one of the central aspects of Tantrism.

Now, from a metaphysical point of view, the “divine couple” is a symbol of the two principal aspects of every cosmic principle: the male deity representing the unchangeable and transcending aspect and the female one representing power, strength, force of manifestation, and, in a certain sense, also the active and immanent aspect. Therefore, the appearance of Shaktism in the ancient Hindu Aryan world, apart from its popular and devotional forms, is a barometrical sign of a change in beliefs. It tells us how, compared to the former consciousness of man, which was focused on the realm of being, the “manifestation” and “action” aspects of the deity were felt more directly and took on a special importance³

Now there is no question whether in this we have simultaneously also the basic character of modern Western civilization, in which immanence is the by-word. Furthermore, the chief meaning of the word Shakti is capacity to act, authority, and power. Speculative Tantrism conceives the world, life, and man as existing essentially as a sort of power. It speaks of an active “Brahman.” Maya, carried back to Maya-Shakti, which no longer means a cosmic illusion, but rather the manifestation of her essence which is made up of will 2 For comparisons among the various formulations of the doctrine of the four ages and its utilization in general metaphysics of history, see Julius Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1995), part II.

3 The fact that in certain aspects Shaktism must be considered as a revival of a pre-Aryan archaic substratum does not alter the aforementioned interpretation.

2 “icchamayi.”

Moreover, Kali — an equivalent of Shakti, who according to the Tantra “is entirely awake” in the Kali Yuga — also has her demonic, unchained, and savage aspects. Could it not be that their counterpart in the modern world is whatever can prove the irruption of irrational and elemental forces, a “tellurism” and a demon of collectivistic currents which, at bottom, reveal themselves as the soul of the same world of technology, while their counterpart is made up by the religion of the future, by “vitalistic” theories, and by the discovery of the unconscious-instinctive, nocturnal face of the soul?

Three

It cannot be denied that, under this aspect, there are motives in the Tantric conception capable of serving as the mirror of modern civilization in its most daring and problematic forms. On the other hand, what other point of view could be more fascinating for the Westerner's vocation than the one for which, according to De la Vallée Poussin, the Absolute Self ceases to be an ecstatic experience and becomes instead something that he, who has seen the light, can grasp and master.⁴

In the adept, in the Siddha, and in the Vira, the Tantric Kaula exalt the individual who is superior to every pair of contraries, is free from both good and evil, and whose laws is only his will (cvecchacari), thus going much further that Nietzsche's "superman." By following this road, the asceticism of a mortifying type is replaced by Hatha Yoga techniques that tend to rule the inmost forces of the body, together with a wisdom that proclaims, together with Kularnava-tantra: "The body is the temple of God and the living consciousness (jiva) is the eternal Shiva (Sadashiva)."

The ritual Tantric secret (pancatattva) proclaims the non-existence of the antithesis between asceticism and enjoyment, between yoga and bhoga. It promises the possession of the one and of the other, pointing out that the place of liberation is in this world and not in the other one (yoga bhojate, mokhyate samsarah).

4 L. De La Vallee Poussin, Bouddhisme (Paris, 1898), 48.

3 The observance of moral rules as well as of visible rites is, in such circles, declared to pertain only to the pacu, to the man bound, obtuse, and resembling an animal, while Tantrism promises the esoteric knowledge that makes one free and breaks all chains.⁵

On the basis of this, one might be tempted to speak of a "modern" and even a "Western" Tantrism. And yet in doing so a misunderstanding would certainly arise. These convergences do not erase a fundamental difference in planes and tendencies. Only by acknowledging this difference would it be possible to admit that Tantrism may lead the way for a Western elite that does not want to become the victim of those experiences whereby an entire civilization is on the verge of being submerged.

Firstly, it is worth stressing the point that in Tantrism the enhancing of forces, truths, and qualifications prevailing in the Kali Yuga does not allow a lower level, nor does it allow the datum of existence, to be considered as an ultimate appeal and still less (as in the case of many of our immanent philosophies) as something that must be and must also be glorified.

The values belonging to the highest spiritual realization, such as the ancient Hindu metaphysical tradition conceived it, are maintained.

The actual problem of our age is to find the method to carry it into effect. This method, justly compared to "riding on the back of a tiger," may be summed up in this principle: "In order to obtain freedom, one must employ those same forces that have led to the downfall."

Four

To find the right way in this respect, one must bear in mind that, in the Tantric theory of manifestation, the actual prevalence of the Shaktic element in a given phase (the descending phase, *pravrtti marga*) does not mean anything when compared to the ratio of metaphysical subordination of the Shakti to the principle opposed to it, Shiva, Purusha, or whatever the “male of the Shakti” may be called. In this way some points of reference already exist that are

For more on Tantrism, see Julius Evola, *The Yoga of Power: Tantra, Shakti, and the Secret Way*, trans. Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1992).

completely missing in the modern views of Western activism, of which, in a certain sense, they are the reverse.

In point of fact, according to Hindu and also Tantric views, all action, dynamism, and becoming has a female and negative character. On the contrary, whatever is permanent, unchangeable, and central has a truly male and positive character, possessing the gift of light and being, or, in other words, is the “Lord of the Scepter” (*vajra-dhara*).

This point, therefore, establishes a definite difference between modern horizons and those belonging to the higher forms of Tantrism. If, in a modern world, it is possible to ascertain a saturation of the Shaktic element, particularly in its lowest, materialistic and irrational aspects, the Shivaistic counterpart is lacking. The latter may be termed the true spiritual virility, closely connected to values, tendencies, and sciences even the ideas of which are now lost in the West.

And all this is, instead, taken in due consideration by Tantrism, and not in terms of a merely abstract speculation but as a realization. It is thus clear to see what meaning this tendency may have for people who, even if taken as individuals in themselves, want to impose a limit to forces which otherwise would only result in dissolution.

Five

Shakti is the basis of Tantric life, but the method consists in understanding it with an intensity which, in a certain sense, renders it self-consuming and makes of it an instrument of transformation and transfiguration for an objective change of plane. It must not be forgotten that the main characteristics of Tantric deities must be considered as symbols of destroying forces, “nude,” unfettered, superior to all laws. Kali, Durga, or, in some aspects, Shiva-Rudra himself have such a nature as to be simultaneously the deities of pure transcendence and of internal liberation.

In this connection, a “sacrificial” tendency and a “transforming” moment are to be found in all Tantric methods, even in those that border on magic in a strict sense or on orgiastic revelry, just as a sacred and initiative framing is inseparable to all metaphysics and from the Tantric idea of the world considered as a “power.” This again represents a line of separation, and it is easy to understand fully the condition in which the Western ideal of the affirmation of the Self and its

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freedoms may avoid destructive revolutions, of which we have already certain grim forebodings.

Six

Leaving aside the more exterior and materialistic aspects of the modern civilization of action, it is now necessary to consider what, in a certain sense, may be taken as its central artery. It is the tendency to glorify man, which began during the Renaissance and which, in passing through critical idealism, ethical rationalism, and the “autonomous” morals of the categorical imperative, has arrived at the training of pure will power and the ideal of the superman.

The basis of this tendency remains, on the whole, on a naturalistic, individualistic, and intellectual plane. In such a way, it ends in a blind alley. If we consider it seriously, it is equivalent to a saturation of strength which, given the limitations of human nature, can only end in a short circuit, in the collapse of the superman into the demonic or into forms of “they are raised to me with exercises,” already condemned by ancient wisdom as a dangerous deviation from a true spiritual realization.

There, where one halts in advance of these extreme consequences, it seems clear that, in the West, the only known solution is to give up and to allow religion, in its mystical/humanitarian aspects and forgiveness, to come back into the world.

No less than any other initiatic teaching, even Western ones, Yoga in general, and Tantric and Vajrayanic Yoga in particular, tells us that this alternative may be overcome and that a clear path actually exists, even if according to the saying of the Kathaka Upanishad it looks like walking on a razor’s edge. What the West needs to learn here is that it is a question of an essential and ontological change in nature.

To speak of a “superman” may lead to a misunderstanding. The Western superman expresses the extreme limit or potentiality of the human species, while in Yoga it is the bridge from one species to another one, and, as a goal, it is the detachment from every qualified state, be it human or divine, that one strives to reach through a positive technique confirmed by a multi-millennial tradition, a state that has nothing in common with a demonic state of the intellect and with the prevarications peculiar to the religion of materialistic man.

It is therefore obvious to see where the road ends and a new one begins. In specific reference to the Tantra, there are tendencies in common with the Western vocation to realize an independent and sovereign will.

But, in the first place, this vocation no longer appears as “Luciferian” or “titanic,” but, one might say, as “Olympian,” if one bears in mind the same Tantric symbolism according to which the Shakti embraces the impossible “divine male” made of light and bearing a scepter and to whom she is the raiment of power.

Secondly, in following this course it is necessary to do things seriously. An exceptional qualification is required. Carefulness and an intense concentration are also required, and these

have nothing in common with the exercises of immanent or voluntary philosophy and, in a general way, with simple mental attitudes.

Thirdly, the illusions and pride of the individual self, of what in Hindu terms might be called the Samsaric Self or the Self of elements (Bhutatma) which is practically the only one known to the great majority of modern Westerners, must be forsaken. In fact the destruction of this Self is the condition of true freedom and true power, so that it is the aim of a good number of Yogi techniques as well as of the Tantric ones, even if they are of a Dionysian or orgiastic character.

Seven

All this pertaining to the Kali Yuga must be kept in mind by every Westerner who, although remaining in the same trend in which the predominant forces of his civilization have developed, desires once more by virile means to pave the way towards the higher spheres which he had forsaken under the pretext of conquering the world.

Other factors must also be taken in consideration in order that illusion may not arise and that the contribution of Hindu spirituality of the Yoga type be well understood.

As already hinted, Tantrism follows above all — as regards Yoga — the way of Hatha Yoga, and this also appears to coincide with modern Western tendencies, because contempt for the body is replaced by the ideal of complete mastery over it. But this mastery is internal. In spite of the lack of comprehension due to certain publications divulged in the West, it has nothing of a physical and physiological character.

But the ways leading to the body and originating from the interior, from the “subtle,” and along the lines of which also supernormal experiences may develop — as explained in the teaching we are dealing with — present great difficulties for the majority of Westerners on account of internal century-old processes having almost a constitutional character. To modern man the inner side of the body is closed in the same way as is closed the external reality according to its aspects which are not simply physical, sensitive or space-occupying. Yoga points out to the Westerner the way to be followed so that the soul may in reality master the body and — in accordance with the same ancient Western theory of the relation between macrocosm and microcosm — discover in the body thus mastered and rendered conscious, the source of unusual powers. It remains, however, to be seen in what measure anyone may follow this way and acquire a real knowledge of these processes.

The last point to be taken in consideration, particularly because it is generally misconstrued in Western publications, is that it would be difficult to neglect, in realizations of this kind, the transmission of given “influences” of a spiritual and super-individual character brought about by regular organizations of initiation. Just as the short-circuits mentioned above may be caused by immanence and will, one must also point out the difficulty for the individual to surpass himself, unless exceptional cases are taken in consideration, as compared to the whims of a deceptive self-affirmation. We should remember how the greatest European scholar of Tantrism, Sir John

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Woodroffe, told us that he could not accept the conditions required of him to enter in relations of something more than a simple doctrine with Tantric initiatic organizations.

Eight

In conclusion, what we have stressed before is hereby confirmed.

On the one side there is thus a correspondence between some fundamental Tantric ideas and some predominant tendencies of the modern spirit, on account of which one can seriously notice a certain basis in the Tantra's claim to present an idea suitable to the last age, i.e., to the present day. On the other hand, a well-defined line of demarcation exists between the two dominions, in the exposition of which we have spared no effort.

The capability of certain specially qualified Western minds to cross this line corresponds to the measure in which one can remain faithful to the principal way followed by their civilization without thereby being led towards a crisis without solution. They could change, at least on their own account, a strong poison into a healing medicine. The force that causes some to fall, causes in others a resurrection and participation in something supreme and shining, beyond those powers without centre and scope that belong to the dark ages.

The Concept of Initiation

It is not easy, today, to give an exact idea of what is meant by Initiation and to define the figure of the 'Initiate'. The main difficulty lies in the necessity of referring to a vision of the world and man, and to structures, which belong essentially to traditional civilizations, distant from the present one, not only from the modern mentality and culture, but also, to a large extent, from the religion which has come to predominate in the West.

In addition, there is the disgraceful circumstance that, if, today, one still hears of Initiation, outside of the empty ritualistic remains of modern Freemasonry and such amateurish literary exercises as, for example, the well-known book 'The Great Initiates', by E. Schuré (1), it is on the sidelines of the various theosophical, anthroposophical, or generally occult sects. The discredit which has rightly become attached to these frivolous 'neo-spiritualistic' forms, which are sometimes outright hoaxes, could not but create a prejudice which impedes the understanding of what Initiation really is.

This state of affairs has provided those who claim to represent 'modern critical thought' and contemporary 'culture' with a pretext to assimilate the world of Initiation to that of the 'magicians', 'clairvoyants', and so on, of the lower classes, and to disregard the fact that, historically, Initiation was an integral and frequently essential part of the great traditions and civilizations of the past to which, in other regards, respect and gratitude are paid.

Nevertheless there is a group of modern disciplines- among them, the history of religions, ethnology, and the scientific study of the Orient and of Antiquity- in which certain momentous confusions are almost inevitable if the concept of Initiation is not defined in a precise manner. It can be noted that, in the face of the rich material which is now available, scholars who are highly thought of, such as Frazer and Van der Leew, do not know how to orientate themselves adequately; thus they may be seen making the Initiate, the medicine man, the mystic, the Yogi and even the wizard, into one and the same thing, whereas, between these general types, very precise distinctions must be made. Let us not even speak of what has happened with the psychoanalytical manipulations of this material; what we have already indicated about the views of C. G. Jung, who is one of the main persons responsible for such manipulations, will suffice.

On the positive side, today, almost the only thing we can mention is the contribution made by the Traditionalist current claiming to follow René Guénon; in this field, he is the most serious researcher and he bases himself on much accurate and authentic knowledge. Certainly, his horizons have some limits; however, he has proceeded with a certain rigour and he has maintained a well-calculated distance from the 'neo-spiritualist' by products indicated above, as well as from the so-called 'scientific' researches of specialists of an external and profane nature.

Having described the broad situation in these terms, in what follows we propose to clarify synthetically what should be understood by the term 'Initiation', and according to what spiritual frame of reference it should be regarded. We should warn our readers that our purpose is to define the concept of Initiation in itself and for itself, so to speak in a pure state, as a 'spiritual category'. Readers who are familiar with other works of ours are likely to know already what they will find here summarised; readers who are not so familiar will experience a broadening of horizons because the vision of the higher ideals which humanity has managed to conceive would be rendered incomplete if the initiatory ideal were excluded or ignored. To the first group of readers, the extent to which we follow the views of the aforementioned Traditionalist current, and that to which we have found it necessary to grow away from them, will be self-evident.

I. Etymologically, 'to initiate' means to provide a new commencement. In this respect, one could also speak of a 'rebirth'; but then it would be necessary to give this term a strictly ontological signification. As a matter of fact, the fundamental premise of Initiation is that the human condition, with the limits which define the common individuality, can be surpassed. It is a change of state, a passage from a way of being to another way of being, in the most objective sense. This is why in some testimonies Initiation is described almost as a physical fact, to underline its real, ontological character. The opposition between 'Superman' and 'Initiate' can be helpful to explain the concept of Initiation. The term 'Superman' refers to the extreme and problematic strengthening of the species 'Man'. However, in principle, the Initiate no longer belongs to this species at all. If one has in mind High Initiation, it can be said that the 'Superman' belongs to a Promethean plane (Man remains as he is but seeks, illegitimately, to gain a superior dignity and power), while the Initiate in the proper sense belongs to an Olympian plane (he has acquired an innate, distinct, and justified dignity).

Spiritual Virility

The theory according to which the being possesses multiple states, of which the human is only one, is therefore the premise of the concept of Initiation.

These states must however be considered as not only superior, but also inferior to the one characteristic of the common and normal human personality. Thus we can conceive of a double possibility of opening of this personality, upwards and downwards; consequently, an 'ascending' overcoming (true to the strict etymological sense of the word 'to transcend', i.e., 'to go beyond by rising') must be well distinguished from a 'descending' overcoming (2).

This is why we have just spoken specifically of 'High Initiation', and the distinction indicated then also refers to what we have said elsewhere about primitive peoples constituting a special domain. The tribal initiations of the primitives and their so-called 'age cohort' initiations in general operate in the descending direction. The individual opens himself to the mystical-vital force of his stock, is integrated in it, and makes it his own. Or the integration may concern the deep powers which work formatively in the organism in the various periods of existence. What may result from this for the individual, the new faculties which he can thus acquire, contain however almost always something collective and sub-personal. The results of this show themselves to us in typical forms, for example, in totemism and in some varieties of primitive religions of the dead. To this subject we shall not return in this essay.

We should however distinguish here something which also appears in the area of the higher civilizations. It pertains to the division of Initiation into the Lesser Mysteries, which can be called generically Demetrian-Chthonic, and the Greater Mysteries, which can be called Ouranic or Olympian. Sometimes the Lesser Mysteries have been presented as a preliminary phase and the Greater Mysteries as a culmination. However, at other times, the Lesser and Greater Mysteries, along with many other forms of Initiation which are named differently but which can be referred respectively to the former and the latter, have not shown this character of phases but have been distinct and even opposed to each other. As a matter of fact, the terms can refer to different orientations, vocations and meanings. To simplify, it can be said that the essence of the Lesser Mysteries has a 'cosmic' and, in a certain sense, pantheistic character. Their limit is the hyle, in the broadest and most original sense of the word, i.e. nature, Mater Natura, Mater Magna, the manifested world. The Greater Mysteries are, contrarily, under the sign of Transcendence, of what is not 'life', even in the cosmic sense, but supra-life or Being. One could therefore speak, in the former case, of a rebirth into Life, and, in the latter, of a rebirth into Being, as ends of the corresponding Initiations. Yet, the concept of Initiation gains the fullness of its higher significance essentially with respect to the second direction.

The initiations which aimed at establishing or renewing a contact with special powers of nature should be considered on their own, as a variety of the Lesser Mysteries. In the traditional world, various initiations corresponding to specific crafts are of this type.

II. Next, we should distinguish the world of religion from that of Initiation.

Here a certain schematization cannot be avoided. Basically, there are religions in which an Initiation is present, and from the point of view of the history of religion it is a fact that some religions have developed from a domain which originally had an initiatory character, through a process of popularization, of flattening, and of externalization of the original teachings and practices. Buddhism is characteristic of this: there is a real gulf between what can be called the pure 'doctrine of awakening' and the related practices at the origin of Buddhism, and the religion which spread subsequently. It can be stated, however, that, in a complete Traditional system, Religion and Initiation are two hierarchically ordered degrees, whose relation in the doctrinal field is expressed by the following binaries: exoterism and esotericism; mere faith and gnosis; devotion and spiritual accomplishment; plane of the dogmas and myths and plane of metaphysics.

The present history of religions hardly brings out, or does not bring out at all, this essential articulation, and the way of conceiving religion which has come to predominate in the West, to the suggestive power of which many independent scholars are subject without realizing it, shows that 'religion' can in fact become a category in itself, quite precisely determined and defined in opposition to everything which is initiatory and metaphysical. This conception derives to a large extent from the beliefs of the Semitic peoples, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, characterized, in their positive forms, by theism, creationism and the concept of man as generated per iatum (i.e., generated by the deity as a detached being). Islam indeed possesses an esoteric and initiatory tradition in the contexts of Shi'ism and Sufism; Judaism has a related tradition, in the Kabbala; but these currents are in a certain manner separated from orthodoxy.

In Catholicism, their equivalent is completely lacking, since, instead of esotericism and initiatory experience, there is on the one hand mere mysticism, and on the other, as we shall note below, the curious phenomenon of structures which, in form, are of the initiatory type, but which are applied in a non-initiatic manner.

We can explain in sum the specific character of the religious perspective *per se* as opposed to the initiatory one by saying that the former is centred on the conception of the deity as person (= theism), and is defined by an essential, ontological, distance, between this God-person, whose place is principal, and man, whose place is subordinate, which results in a transcendence which admits only relations of dependence, of devotion, or, at the extreme, transport and mystical ecstasy, while the limit corresponding to the relation "human 'I' - divine 'Thou'" remains firm.

Initiation, by contrast, has as its premise the removal of this limit, and in its place posits the principle of the 'Supreme Identity', whose counterpart is a supra-personal conception of the First Principle. Beyond God-as-person, there is the Unconditioned, a superior reality to both Being and non-Being, and to any specifically religious representation (some have spoken of a "Supergod"). As is well-known, in Hindu metaphysics, and in the original forms of Buddhism, for instance, the personal god, the gods and the celestial kingdoms were recognized, but an

inferior degree of reality was accorded to them and they were considered as belonging themselves to the realm of the conditioned. The Absolute is beyond them. In Neoplatonism, whose connections to the world of the Hellenistic Mysteries are established, we find analogous conceptions.

This shows how arbitrary it is to speak indiscriminately of 'religion' wherever there are relations between man and a supra-human world.

III. From the practical point of view, the metaphysical principle of identity leads to the replacement of relations of a moral and devotional character with relations of knowledge. This finds its main expression in the idea that what defines the human state with all its conditionalities is not an ontological distance, but only 'ignorance' or 'oblivion'. This truth has sometimes been sensed also by high mysticism (Meister Eckhart: man is God, but 'does not know' he is such- which corresponds precisely to the Hindu theory of avidya, or 'ignorance'). The concept of salvation or redemption is thus replaced by that of awakening and metaphysical awareness of the dimension of transcendence as such. It is in these terms that the specific attainment of the Initiate should be defined. Its essential character is that of a 'centrality'.

Thus, some have opposed to the concept of ecstasy that of en-stasy, indicative of the opposite direction, not of a 'going out', but of a reconvergence towards the centre- besides, mysticism itself has known the saying: "You have not found Me because you have sought Me outside of yourself, while I (the deity) was within you". Another formula is that of the centre which unites with the Centre, of the one which unites with the One.

The essential distinction which has just been indicated between the religious and the initiatory perspectives would seem nevertheless compromised by the fact that, even in the religions of salvation, the aim seems to be the overcoming of mortal and fleeting nature. But, again, it is necessary to acknowledge that these terms have a different meaning there, and also that historically various forces have interacted and given rise to a promiscuity which does not let us distinguish the component parts with any clarity. This point can be explained by considering the special problem of existence in the afterlife.

What is peculiar to the Traditional 'Inner (i.e. esoteric) Teachings' is the distinction between immortality and survival in a generic sense. The difference between the Initiatory orientation and the conception of the religious type has been expressed adequately by a scholar of the Far Eastern tradition (Granet), who pointed out that in the religious perspective, the concept of a soul immortal in itself is never questioned, and the alternative is only the passage of this immortal soul after death to positive or negative states ('paradises' or 'hells'), a moral criterion being decisive in this; however, for the 'Inner Teachings', immortality is something problematic and uncertain, and the alternative is rather between survival and non survival- in fact, not so much at the moment of physical death as at the moment referred to as the 'second death'.

Immortality in the proper sense is an exceptional possibility and coincides with the 'deconditionalisation' of the Being.

'Great Liberation', the passage beyond any transitory state, be it even supra-terrestrial, is the aim of the Great Initiation. As is well-known, the concept of 'second death' is recurrent, especially in the ancient Egyptian texts related to the world beyond the grave, and it is notable that the related remarks which are found in the Old Testament are an echo of such initiatory teaching.

Another example, though somewhat mythologised, is provided by Greek tradition, in the opposition between the privileged and Olympian immortality of the Initiates and 'Heroes' identified with demi-gods, for the few, and the destiny of Hades for 'the great number'. But perhaps it was in Taoism, not speculative but practical, that this doctrine- the problematic nature of immortality and the Initiatory condition for it- found their more precise formulation. The teachings expressed in the so-called Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol), finally, amplify these fundamental ideas in an objective manner, propounding the phenomenology of the possible experiences of the world beyond the grave and always opposing the accomplishment of the Unconditioned to the passage to one or another of the possible human or non-human forms of existence, to none of which the attribute of immortality, of the non-transient, of stability, or of transcendent centrality can be referred in any way. And, here again, the alternative is determined by 'knowledge' in the aforementioned metaphysical sense, and by actions of the spirit only possible to the possessor of such knowledge.

The common theme of these various examples is in obvious opposition to exoteric religious ideas about a naturally immortal soul and its destinies in the after-life, ideas which are often linked to the democratization and degradation of a previous initiatory teaching. Thus, in Egypt and also in Greece; Rohde rightly noted in relation to Greece how, following the decline of the original conception of the 'hero', they ended up considering as a 'hero' everyone, including those who had no other merit than that of being dead.

It is worth pointing out that, in the ancient tradition of the Mysteries (which the current history of religions often confuses with the religions of salvation, the so-called Erlösungsreligionen), the essential ontological aspect by which the Initiatory conception is opposed to the religious one is highlighted. From Diogenes Laertius we know of the scandal provoked in certain already 'illuminist' Greek circles by the Mystery doctrine according to which even a delinquent Initiate would have a privileged destiny after death, to which even men of such high moral intelligence as Agesilas or Epaminondas, as uninitiates, would not have access. In this connection, one can speak of a 'transcendental realism', which is confirmed also in the conception of the objective effectiveness of the Initiatory rite: it is admitted that its power is, on the spiritual plane, as objective and impersonal, and as detached from morality, as, on the material plane, actions of a technical nature are. Like such actions, the rite only requires that certain objective conditions are satisfied; then the effect will follow of its own accord by necessity, whoever the subject (3).

We may add that even in the first centuries of Christianity this opposition was still to a certain extent sensed, when the distinction was drawn between deification and sanctification. Deification is an ontological concept, it is defined in terms of change of essence, like the Initiatory transformation of Being. Sanctification has instead a moral and subjective character, which pertains essentially to the attitudes of the individual and to a certain conduct of life. In the development of Christian mysticism, after the beginnings (in which, especially in the Greek Church Fathers, there were remains of esoteric and Mystery traditions), the concept of sanctification got the upper hand almost exclusively (Augustinism, Spanish mysticism).

The conception to which we have just referred, nevertheless, seems to be contradicted by the fact that, even in what is known to us of Initiatory traditions, in Yoga and similar disciplines, strict precepts of a moral character can often be found. However, it is precisely in this respect that an essential difference between the world of religion and the world of Initiation, and between the religious attitude and the Initiatory attitude, stands out, because precepts which can be identical in both cases nevertheless acquire a different meaning in each. In the first case, they are given an intrinsic imperative power, either because they are considered as parts of a revealed divine law, or because an absolute validity, analogous to the categorical moral law of Kant, is claimed for them. In the second case, they have instead the significance of means ordered to an end; they are considered only as conditions to the extent that to follow them creates in the individual certain favourable dispositions for Initiatory transformation. The classical expression of this instrumental conception of moral precepts is given by the well-known Buddhist simile of the raft: it is said that the sila, that is, the totality of the moral precepts, is to be compared to a raft built and used to cross a current; once the raft has carried out its task, it is absurd to carry the raft further (it could be added: it would be equally absurd to build it, if one did not propose to cross any water-course).

This is how the relationship between Initiation and morality can be defined.

In general and in every tradition, from the Initiatory point of view, it is necessary to distinguish a part which has an exclusively social and mundane value, acting as a factor to hold in check the human animal, and a part which is really turned upwards, towards transcendence. The relativity of moral precepts becomes clear in both of these areas. In the first case, moral precepts undergo, in the various traditions, ethnic and historical conditionalities which make it impossible to find anything really constant and invariable, and therefore intrinsically valid, in the numerous varieties of rule prescribed according to times and places. In the second case, when, that is, a purely instrumental value is attributed to moral precepts, the sole criterion is the extent to which the means- of whatever nature- allow the goal to be reached, so that, not only are very different Initiatory paths indicated, with a view to the predominant dispositions of this or that individual, but also the chosen means may be in complete contrast to the moral precepts which a tradition in its exoteric aspects prescribes for the life of the majority in the world. The most typical cases are the so-called 'Left-Hand Path' of the Tantric vāmācāra (which has some points of contact with Dionysianism- for example, when it comes to the use of sex and the emphasis put on the

orgiastic and destructive element), and the 'heroic path' (*vîra-mârga*), which, under the sign of pure transcendence, have as principle a true anomia, and a scorn for the common moral and religious rules, although the ultimate end is not different from that of the 'Right-Hand Path', which instead uses such rules as a support ("the rules which do not chain but sustain those who do not know how to go by themselves").

In general, the recurrence of 'antinomianism' (this word designates the rejection of the rules of the current religion), which almost always indicates connections with the world of Initiation or of esotericism, is well-known in the history of religions.

IV. What has been said so far will help to make it clear also that, between mysticism and Initiation, a boundary must be marked out. This point is generally neglected and confusion between the two domains is common, therefore it will be a good idea to add a few short considerations. To be accurate, in terms of mere etymology, mysticism refers to the Initiatory world because the 'mystes' (hence 'mysticism') was the follower of the ancient Mysteries. But, once again, we find ourselves in front of a typical case of the corruption of language. In its now current signification, the word 'mysticism' can legitimately be used only to designate a phenomenon with a specific physiognomy of its own, namely the extreme limit of the world of religion alone. First of all, this is a matter of fundamental orientation. To use terms already mentioned, mysticism is under the sign of ecstasy, Initiation under the sign of ecstasy; extroverted motion in the first case, introverted motion in the second. In accordance with the structure of the religious spirit, the position of the mystic with respect to transcendence is essentially 'eccentric' (=decentred). Hence, the prevailing characteristic of mysticism is passivity, and of the Initiatory state, activity. A very common mystical symbol, especially in the West, is that of the spiritual wedding, in which the human soul plays the feminine role of the bride, which would be absurd on the initiatory plane. However, the passivity of the mystic is inherent in the prevalence of the emotional element, emotional and sub-intellectual, and it is reflected in the prevailing character of mystical experience, which chokes and overwhelms the conscious principle of the I, rather than being controlled and dominated by it. Thus the mystic, almost always, has no precise idea of the road covered, and is unable to grasp or indicate the real and objective content of his experiences.

The subjective moment and elements of a purely human nature prevail, the soul having ascendancy over the spirit (this is what renders the reading of the texts, the monotonous emotional effusions, of the majority of Christian mystics, almost unbearable- one can skim through, for example, the anthology called 'The Mystics' published by E. Zolla).

Thus one can legitimately speak symbolically of the mystical path as an essentially damp one, as opposed to the dry Initiatory one. It is undeniable that some mystics have occasionally reached metaphysical heights, but without attaining true transparency, so to speak, through flashes and raptures, through the momentary lifting up of a curtain which immediately after fell down.

Besides, the mystic as such is a lonely vagrant. He ventures into the domain of the supra-sensible without having true principles to orientate himself and without having at his disposal a true protection. Once he has left the ground of positive and dogmatic tradition, he is on his own. There are no chains of mystics, that is to say, of teachers who transmit the mystical tradition in an unbroken manner, with a related, adequate doctrine and practice. As a matter of fact, mysticism appears as a mainly sporadic and irregular phenomenon.

It develops above all in those traditions which have an incomplete character, that is to say, in which mere religion and exoterism do not find their integration and completion in Initiation and esotericism. Essentially, and in opposition to the character of the merely mystical experience, it is necessary to point out the conscious, noetic, and intellectual character attributed to the true Initiatory experience.

V. At this point, the essential pattern of what, according to some circles, 'regular' Initiation would be, may be mentioned. A discrepancy between the aforementioned theoretical premise (namely, that Initiatory teaching, denying the concept of 'creature', also denies the idea of a hiatus or ontological distance between the Being and the principle of the I) and the practical attitude seems to arise, given the assertion that Initiatory experience, insofar as it consists of an overcoming of the human condition and a passage to superior states, cannot be realized optimally with the resources of the isolated individual alone. Here, however, one usually puts forward a consideration which is more historical and practical than one of principle, that is to say, the existential situation in which the great majority of individuals are placed, owing to the involutionary process which, according to all Traditional doctrines, has occurred in the course of history.

Thus, according to the indicated pattern, Initiation would require the transmission to the Initiand of a special force by the representative of an organisation which is the holder of it and which is also the trustee of esoteric and Initiatory teachings. In this context, the concept of 'Tradition' is specified in objective and technical terms as an unbroken 'chain' which refers to an original centre. Where the present situation makes it possible, it is maintained that this is the 'regular' form of Initiation, a form which, on its own plane, shows some analogies with that of baptism and even more with that of priestly Catholic ordination.

But a different general premise concerning the ontological connections between the human and the supra human is considered here, in the sense that, in the case of Initiation, it is, in the last analysis, a matter of a passage from potentia to actu (determined by the Initiatory operation) of a deep dimension of the very Being of the Initiate.

This idea was also entailed in that of 'virtual Initiation', which, moreover, remains inefficient and ineffective (as in the case of the quality which is supposed to be infused by mere Catholic baptism), if a proper action does not intervene and is not added. However, if only in exceptional cases, it is not excluded that, in principle, this action alone may cause the disruption of level, the Initiatory opening, of consciousness, without the indicated 'regular' and, to a certain extent,

external ritual, joining the Initiand to an organization.

There exist certain conditionalities, existential or otherwise, for these exceptional cases, on which we cannot dwell here, since the argument is rather complex, and besides, the connection between asceticism and initiation would have to be examined. In the cases which we have just mentioned, this connection is significant, though asceticism should not be considered here in its mortifying, penitential forms, overwhelmed by secondary moral and religious elements, but as an action undertaken by the individual by his own means, which can provoke the 'descent' and the ingrafting into him of a force from above. In such a case, there is a connection which can be said to be 'vertical' or direct, contrary to the 'horizontal' connection through the medium of an Initiatory chain, an integrative meeting between the force which proceeds from below upwards and the supra-individual and supra-human one which proceeds from above downwards - on the religious plane, it would be called the 'gift of grace' - but here, among other things, there is an essential difference due to the determining character of the 'ascetic' action, insofar as it creates in man a quality like that of the magnet which attracts a metal- here, the transcendent influence : this signification, among others, could be given to the saying that "the Kingdom of Heaven can be taken by storm." When such forces meet, the way to Initiatory development is opened, and the premise for the change of state in an autonomous manner is realised.

However, for 'regular' initiation with its 'horizontal' joining, there are also some conditions, with respect to the qualification required in the Initiand.

This qualification has got nothing to do with qualities of a profane character; thus, an eminent representative of culture, a scientist, or a modern philosopher, may be less qualified for Initiation than an almost illiterate person, while, as far as moral qualities are concerned, we have already explained in what sense they can come into play and have a value on the Initiatory plane. In general, the qualification for Initiation pertains to a special existential situation, and it refers to a virtual tendency to self transcendence, to an active opening beyond the human. When it is lacking, the individual is not open to Initiation because either the Initiatory action would not have any effect, or it would be dangerous and destructive.

It would not have any effect in the case of the 'virtual Initiation', namely, when what is merely transmitted is a spiritual influence as a germ which the individual should develop alone (assuming immediately an active realizatory autonomous part- which corresponds to a more or less articulated development in the follower). It would act in a destructive manner in the case of a direct and gross initiation by a master. If the power, which is attributed to some personalities, especially in the East, to provoke directly the Initiatory opening of consciousness, by means of one technique or another, met a rigidity in the structure of the I of the neophyte, the effect would be a trauma, a destruction of the unity of the person. Hence the importance of various preliminary initiatory tests, sometimes described in spectacular terms ; they are always aimed at testing the capacity of supporting self-transcendence leading the individual even on the boundary of death and insanity. The affinity between initiation and death has always been underlined. The expressions which can be found in Plutarch and Porphyry are classical in this respect.

In essence, the Initiatory qualification is that which is required to be able to face actively and 'triumphantly', within one's lifetime existence, an experience corresponding to that of death. Often, a certain unification and harmonisation of the Being is indicated as the requirement for Initiation. It is explained that, when there are imbalances and splits in the individual, they become exacerbated by the contact with transcendent forces and, instead of the integration of the Being, the effect can be its disintegration and ruin. In passing, this shows the mistake of the interpretations of psychoanalysis, which has 'valued' some Initiatory processes as equivalent to psychoanalytic therapy: they have claimed that Initiation would have aimed at restoring a split individuality, an I grappling with the unconscious, with the libido and so on, but by 'pre-scientific' means.

In fact, every Higher Initiation requires as point of departure and as 'qualification' the healthy, unified and perfectly conscious, man. The sole exception is constituted by cases in which certain diseases offer some virtual possibilities of self-transcendence, and have the character of diseases only because these possibilities do not work as such.

Then, Initiatory techniques use them by giving them the right direction and integrating them into the process as a whole. This is attested in the specific case of shamanistic Initiations. One can refer also, in part, to what was called in Antiquity 'sacred diseases' and here a new task would be the clarification of things with respect to those psychiatric 'positivist' interpretations which, especially in the recent past, have claimed to throw a scientific light on many facts of ancient Initiations, of mysticism, and also of demonology, but have actually given rise to extremely serious misapprehensions.

VI. To have spoken about a noetic (intellectual in the superior sense) content of Initiatory, as opposed to mystical, experience should not lead the reader to think of something like theoretical comprehension of a teaching, even of a special or secret character. The attribute here is only meant to indicate the character peculiar to this experience as such: always as experience, essentially, of a state. It is about the superior character of lucidity which was referred in the Antiquity to the nous, to the intellect in the eminent sense: and here what we have said elsewhere about the mistake of irrationalism can be recalled. Nevertheless, the new state created by Initiatory rebirth has always been considered as the indispensable premise and the principle of a knowledge of a superior character. It is a knowledge for which symbols, myths and signs above all (the 'language of silence') appear as paths, in which their true signification is revealed. For this knowledge, the word 'Attainment' is often used, with reference to direct grasp, through identification, of the essences, in sensible and direct experience ; with an overcoming of the dualistic state by means of which 'common knowledge', when it is not mere conceptual abstraction, is always under the object-subject law. But here it is immediately necessary to re emphasize the indicated noetic character, in order to oppose the tendency to confuse what is being discussed with that which is peculiar to a sub intellectual, vital and emotional identification, similar to that supported by modern irrationalism.

Where the cognitive aspects of Initiatory development have been considered in a special and systematic manner- one can refer, for example, to the classic *jñâna-yoga* in its divisions- a process has occurred which, gradually, has led to the achievement of that *intuitio intellectualis*, or noumenal knowledge, which represents in Kant a limiting concept introduced only to characterise by contrast that which, according to him, is the only possible form of knowledge for man.

Knowledge as Attainment is knowledge which transforms and illuminating knowledge. In this respect, what is called 'esotericism' can be considered in a special light. Esotericism does not deal with a knowledge monopolised and held secret in an artificial manner, but rather with a truth which becomes obvious only at a level of consciousness different from that of the common man, of the profane man, and also of the simple believer. The 'secrecy' in which esoteric truth can be held pertains precisely to the fact that, in relation to the common man, this truth ceases to be true, becomes indeed rather dangerous, and can bring about his ruin. It is claimed that the conviction and execution of some Initiates, the dignity of whom was far from being ignored (as a typical case, that of Al-Hâllaj in Islam is produced) was due to their not having recognised this requirement: it is not a matter of 'heresy', but of practical and pragmatic reason. A typical saying in this respect goes like this: "That the wise with his wisdom does not trouble the minds of those who do not know."

When, however, Initiatory knowledge is applied to the disclosure of Traditional material, a beneficial side effect analogous to the acquisitions of the science of comparative religion on the cultural plane may be mentioned.

On the Initiatory level, what a modern representative of the Traditionalist current called 'the transcendent unity of religions' is valid, although, in this connection, the word 'religion' has too restrictive a character. Different symbols, myths, rites, dogmas and teachings reveal a constant content, according to an identity which is not derived from an extrinsic process of borrowing and of historical transmission, but essentially from a common metaphysical and a-temporal content. The point of departure being, in the case of esotericism, the direct, experiential perception of this content, the correspondences which can be established here assume a special character of evidence which distinguishes them clearly from exterior comparisons, so to speak quantitatively based, such as can be found in the expositions of the science of comparative religion.

As a counterpart to this intuitive penetration of the constant contents beyond the multiplicity of historical and exoteric forms, what has been called the "gift of tongues" (some people would say that there is an allegorical and exoteric reference to it in the well-known episode of the Old Testament) is regarded, in general, as a distinguishing mark of the true Initiate. Just as the one who knows many languages knows how to exhibit the same concept in the words of one language or another, so is regarded the ability to exhibit, in the words of one tradition or another, the same content from the plane which is anterior and superior to the multiplicity of these traditions.

However, it should be borne in mind that not every language has the same expressive possibility and an equally complete vocabulary.

VII. The last point to which we shall allude in these short notes no longer pertains to the definition in itself of the pure concept of Initiation, but to the connection between the plane of Initiation and that of mundane reality and of history. Above all in recent times the conception of the secret character of the quality of Initiate has prevailed. Thus, this saying of a Sufi (Islamic Initiate) could be cited: "That I am a Sufi is a secret between me and God".

The 'Hermetic' character of the Initiate is clear, moreover, from the same Initiatory current-alchemical Hermeticism, one of the main currents in the post-Christian West- from which this adjective is specifically derived. In this respect, if we go back further in time, a different possibility is also attested.

Having a look at the civilizations which, in an eminent sense, we can call Traditional- to those civilizations, thus, which had an organic and sacred character and in which "all activities were ordered adequately from top to bottom" - at the centre of such civilizations we often find, quite visible, figures with features similar to those attributed to the Initiates. This centre being constituted, if we may put it this way, of an 'immanent transcendence', that is to say, of the real presence of the non-human in the human, it presupposes particular beings or elites, there is precisely a correspondence with the form of spirituality which defines the Initiate and distinguishes him, for example, from the priest, because the priest, at best, is a mediator of the divine and the supernatural, but does not incorporate it in himself with a character of 'centrality'.

The 'divine royalty' at the origins in a great number of civilizations had indeed this metaphysical character (4). A typical case is that of ancient Egypt, where the rites which established or confirmed the quality of the sovereign did not differ from the rites of Osirification and, in general, from the rites which ensured the change of nature, rebirth and privileged immortality. Many other testimonies of the same type could be produced, even if each individual case would require special consideration. Besides, residual traces of this primordial tradition are still attested in the Western medieval age, in the context of Christianity itself, because the rite of consecration of the king originally only differed in matters of detail from that of consecration of the bishops, which was held to bring about a transformation of the nature of the one who was the object of it, and the ingrafting into him of a new character *indelebilis* (in this comparison, we only consider the mere formal correspondence- and the indicated difference between the orientation of the priest, that of the Initiate, and that of the King in the original Tradition is not compromised by this) (5).

Thus, in other periods, besides the secret or 'Hermetic' type of the Initiate, a type is attested who, finding his natural and legitimate place at the top and centre of an organization which was sacral and also political, also acted as a symbol, and who, by incorporating a superior force or principle, was believed to be able to exercise a direct action, visible and invisible, on historical, political and social reality (this idea was particularly emphasized in the Far East). The type of civilization

which has come to predominate in historical times has however increasingly denied the unity of the two powers, spiritual and political, and has suppressed therefore this function too, which, in general, was attributed to a visible leader known to have Initiatory features.

Besides, in Europe, the character of its religion, Christianity, has progressively driven underground any strands or centres of Initiatory tradition which might have survived. In fact, historical Christianity not only does not have an Initiatory tradition, but its specifically religious orientation (in the main sense of the word 'religious' which we have defined above) has opposed any such tradition. We have already pointed out the weird phenomenon that we meet in Catholic Christianity: a sort of imitation of the Initiatory pattern.

Baptism conceived as a rite which will transmit a principle of supernatural life to the Christian by differentiating him essentially from every non-Christian and providing the necessary condition for salvation; supernatural influences linked to the apostolical and pontifical traditions and claimed as basis for the efficacy of the sacraments; the objectivity of the character *indelebilis* created by priestly ordination; and so on- all this shows obvious formal analogies with Initiatory structures. But the plan is different, the orientation is different. It can be said that an image or reproduction has replaced reality and has been used to try to create an order on a different existential plane (6).

This is not the matter we wish to discuss here, nor is the organizing function which Catholicism was able to develop in the Western world. We will note, however, that the latter has not been able to hinder the birth of the modern world, and of the modern 'civilization', in the Christianised area, nor the progressive destruction of any traditional order and the affirmation of forms of subversion and materialism which, starting from the West, are becoming planetary in scope and are showing an increasing irreversibility. A problem, rather, would be posed when the real existence in the world of the most recent times of true Initiatory centres, and therefore also of persons in virtual possession of these powers which are derived from the very concept of Initiation, is asserted. Then, it would be necessary to ask ourselves whether any connection exists between these persons and historical developments. Given the course taken by such developments, no longer only in the West, the idea of a secret influence from behind the scenes would be problematic ; for many reasons, an action of this type would be better attributed to opposite powers, to those of an anti-Traditional destructive force, called, in certain circles, a 'counter-initiation'.

In general, in this respect, the idea of a 'withdrawal' of Initiatory presences from the process of history has been put forward. But even without considering the domain of history, limiting oneself to the spiritual plane alone, most of those who have some qualification to give a decision on this matter agree that the Initiatory organizations in a position to claim an authentic filiation in Europe are now either non-existent or in a phase of degeneration (the possibility of such degeneration poses, in its turn, a difficult problem), and that even the few existing outside Europe have become more and more inaccessible, while the falsifications and the mystifications proliferate: which corresponds to one of the features of what has been called the 'dark age'.

Such a situation has its effects upon the concept of Initiation itself, in the sense that anyone today who has Initiatory aspirations, by force of necessity, should consider a different path from that still termed 'regular', constituted by the 'horizontal' joining with an existing living chain. Thus, it seems that the perspective of an essentially 'vertical' and autonomous joining becomes the more possible, by virtue of an exceptional individual qualification and by that action, to a certain extent violent, which we have already mentioned when we talked about the connections between Initiation and asceticism. On this matter, in circles seriously interested in the problems of Initiation, controversies have developed lately and those who insist on asserting exclusively the 'regular' patterns of initiation in abnormal times like ours have been accused, not unjustly, of formalist bureaucratism distant from reality.

It is not eccentric on our part to question their view. In fact, in addition to the importance, for the reasons we indicated at the beginning, of the formation in abstract terms of a clear idea of what Initiation is and of the differences between its domain and other spiritual domains, today it would be interesting to establish if, to what extent and in what contexts, Initiatory attainment is still possible at all. The problem is of essential importance to those who have made an absolutely negative assessment of all the cultural, social, ideological and religious values existing today, and are at a dead point ; for them, perhaps, the superior freedom which has always been the aspiration of whoever tried the Initiatory path constitutes the only alternative to the forms of revolt peculiar to a destructive, irrational and even criminal nihilism.

These last considerations fall, naturally, outside the topic of the theoretical definition of the concept of Initiation (and it is this definition in which, in general, most of our readers will be interested), but perhaps they can provide the necessary context for a comprehensive evaluation of it.

Since we have mentioned the contribution to the study of Initiation made by René Guénon and the Paris-based group inspired by him, it is perhaps advisable to mention the special case constituted by a small group which has formed in Turin at the time of this writing, which would like to be 'Traditional' and devoutly Guénonian (7). Although it cannot be relegated to the plane of the numerous neo-spiritualistic conventicles, nevertheless it makes Guénonianism into a veritable scholasticism (in the second-rate sense). As true aspirants to the 'top of their class', its members slavishly follow their teacher, with tedious and stereotyped repetitions, to the point of suffocating the more lively elements of his doctrine instead of developing them, going deeper into them, or achieving any eventual revisions and integrations of those points in Guénon where, despite all his efforts, problems remain which are not by any means about 'metaphysics' (in his sense), but about simple philosophy, and where some consequences, often simplistic, of his personal equation can be felt.

In the meantime, in a magazine, they presume to be able to start judging Traditionalist 'orthodoxy' ex-cathedra and calling whoever does not follow their line 'profane' and deviationist, avoiding naturally the production of any entitlement which would justify this frivolous pretense of theirs. As a matter of fact, neither their passive, easy theoretical conformism, nor their being -

according to what they claim- on good terms with Freemasonry, can authorize them to regard themselves as 'non profanes': since, in Freemasonry, there is no real, actual and experiential initiation whatever, but only empty, ineffective, debased, ritualistic remains, if not something even worse (compare what we have brought forward on this subject in the last chapter of our 'Mystery of the Grail') All this shows a definite lack of sensibility or qualification.

This brief clarification may have assisted the orientation of our readers. One merit of the conventicle in question, whose existence is likely to be ephemeral, must be granted to be the production of editions of some books and writings by Guénon in Italian, although it would have been useful to have provided introductions specifically for these editions outlining the contents of the texts and their limitations point by point.

Notes:

- (1) Edouard Schuré: 'The Great Initiates: A Study of the Secret History of Religions'
(Steinerbooks, New York, 1961)
- (2) Exactly these two tendencies, almost as a reflection, can be discerned on a more exterior plane completely outside the Initiatory domain, in the life itself of the man of our days. Thus A. Huxley (and also Jean Wal), referring to this man, has also talked about an "upward self-transcendence" and a "descending self-transcendence", adding a third direction called by him "horizontal" or "lateral self-transcendence". For Huxley, today, the most widespread experiences in the descending direction are linked to the use of alcohol, of drugs and of a pandemic sexuality; horizontal or lateral self transcendence would manifest itself in the collectivising phenomena, in the passive and irrational identification of the individual with assorted fanatical currents or movements or ideologies, with the manias of the day. For the man of today, both the descending self-transcendence and the lateral one are, according to Huxley, forms of escapism (we would add: and of regression). However, both mix because, in all which is collective, 'infernal' powers, that is to say powers of the sub-personal level, always act, and are perceptible upon the surface. To give everyone his due, Jung is right when he says that the ancient demons against possession by which one sought in other times to defend oneself, today, in the "illuminated and progressed" world, have not disappeared but continue to function in disguise at the root of the various 'isms' (nationalism, progressivism, communism, racism, and so on), as collectivising forces of 'horizontal' escapism.

(Note by editors: Even though to give everyone his due is the least that one can do, the fact that both 'nationalism' and 'racism' are included in this list of pernicious 'isms' will come, to say the least, as a surprise to the reader who is familiar with Evola's writings on nationalism and race in the thirties and in the early forties. We may explain the apparent contradiction by distinguishing unacceptable from acceptable 'nationalisms' and 'racisms' thus : regarding 'nationalism', the reader will recall the pertinent distinction made by Evola as early as in 'Revolt against the Modern World' between a 'catagogic nationalism', for which the nation is conceived of as a mere mystical-biological collectivity, as a more or less abstract national consciousness distinct from

others, the one which was actually used by the forces of subversion to undermine and to destroy the remains of the European traditional society throughout the XIXth century, and, on the other hand, a nationalism which may constitute a putting right, a recovery, a reintegration with respect to the latter situation, 'anagogical nationalism', for which the nation is seen and felt as an entity in itself, a person, on the basis of a traditional hierarchical caste order; and regarding 'racism' we recall that while rightly condemning biological racism, a racism only based on the colour of the skin, he also praised the superior form of racism which he upheld, going so far as to state, in 'The Elements of Racial Education' (1941): "racism has the value of a test, of a reagent, even in its most general formulations. The reactions of this or that person towards the racist idea are a sort of barometer which show us the 'quantity' of race which is found in the person in question.

To say yes or no to racism is not merely to differ intellectually, it is not something subjective and arbitrary. The one who says yes to racism is the one in whom race still lives: the one who has been internally defeated by the anti-race and in whom the original forces have been stifled by ethnic waste, by processes of cross-breeding and degeneration, or by a bourgeois, weak, and intellectualistic style of life which has lost for generations any contact with anything which is really originary, opposes it and searches in all directions for alibis in order to justify his aversion and discredit racism.")

(3) Naturally, the variety of the subjects will result in a variety of effects, just as the action of fire is different if it is exerted on water, on wood or on a metal.

(4) With respect to the indicated character of 'centrality', of 'immanent transcendence', the sovereign of such civilizations, structurally, can therefore be connected to the type of the Initiate more than to the type of the priest, even though his nature qualifies him for sacerdotal functions. This is what Guénon has not grasped, since he insists that, in normal traditional civilizations, the supreme representative of spiritual authority at the top and centre would have been the type of the priest, with entails the subordination of royalty to a sacerdotal caste. This, in reality, does not by any means describe the original and higher state, but pertains to a situation which is to be considered abnormal from the traditional point of view.

(5) Further on this topic consult the first chapters of our work 'Revolt Against the Modern World'.

(6) The question of the existence or non-existence of a Christian initiation was lately the object of discussion in some Traditionalist circles (cf. the review *Etudes Traditionnelles*, 1965. n. 389-390). To what we have just said, that is, that the sacramental Catholic corpus appears, in some respects, as a kind of representation transposed onto the religious plane of Initiatory structures, some have added that such structures existed originally on the plane of true Initiation, and even that they could also have continued to be such later on in Christianity. Some excerpts of the Greek Church Fathers, above all, were produced, where the distinction between the simple believers and those who are in possession of a superior knowledge (of the 'perfect gnosis') are met with, and where an esoteric interpretation of the

Sacred Christian Writings is alluded to.

In more recent times, however, speculation has moved towards the Christianity of the Greek-Orthodox Church (because it is admitted that in the West, from the council of Nicea, the purely religious forms have completely prevailed), and the current of 'hesychasm' has been considered by some to be characterizable as a "Christian yoga"; some expressions of one of the main representatives of this current, Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) were cited, concerning a rite of transmission of a power (the 'holy spirit') through the laying on of hands, distinct from baptism ; a rite which is thought to have had the aspect of an 'initiatory transmission".

However, originally, especially in Greek Patristics, the mixtures of Christianity with motifs belonging essentially to non-Christian mysteriosophy are obvious, and the example given by Origen shows what the alleged "esoteric interpretation" amounts to in fact. If, in the so-called Apocryphal Gospels, and also in everything which has passed under the name of gnosticism in the history of religions, elements of a superior knowledge are found, all this nevertheless falls outside the central and official current of positive Christianity, just as, for example, in later times, the current of the Brothers of the Free Spirit does. Hesychasm itself has to be considered as an isolated vein of Greek-Orthodox Christianity and the rite of the laying on of hands seems to us to have the generic character of 'Blessing', at best that of a 'virtual Initiation', not that of a real operation of Initiatory opening of consciousness. These are lateral phenomena.

Naturally, from within Christianity and sometimes also from within certain religious regular orders, some have managed to reach sporadically a level superior to that of theistic devotional religion (even in the Protestant area).

But this is another question, which does not prove by any means the existence and continuation of an Initiatory Tradition, which, by its very nature, should have had its place at the centre and top of historical Christianity, especially of Catholic Christianity, and should have been the keeper of an 'Orthodoxy' in a superior sense. Against this, the arguments produced by those indicated above have no probatory force.

On the other hand, the question can to be resolved on the morphological and doctrinal plane: it is necessary to judge if what we have brought forward until now really corresponds to the essence of the Initiatory reality. If it corresponds to this reality, one must ask whether it is compatible with what can be said to be characteristic of the positive tradition and central conception of Christianity. The reply, we believe, is not in doubt, and shows other considerations to be peripheral. To put it drastically, in our opinion, what can be Initiatory in Christianity is not Christian and what is Christian in it is not Initiatory.

(7) Evola refers here to Edizioni Studi Tradizionali, which, in the middle of the Sixties, printed various hitherto unpublished works by Guénon in Italy, and to their paper, the Rivista di Studi Tradizionali, which would regularly publish critical articles against him, and with which he often exchanged polemics. Evola's reply to them is constituted by an article called

Spiritual Virility

'René Guénon e la scolastica guénoniana", which can be found in an English translation in 'René Guénon : a teacher for modern times' (N.D.T.)

from "**The Doctrine of Awakening: Buddhist Varieties of Ascesis**"

Varieties of Ascesis

The original meaning of the term ascesis—from ἀσλέω, "to train"—was simply "training" and, in a Roman sense, discipline. The corresponding Indo-Aryan term is tapas (tapa or tapo in Pāli) and it has a like significance: except that, from the root tap, which means "to be hot" or "to glow," it also contains the idea of an intensive concentration, of glowing, almost of fire.

With the development of Western civilization, however, the term ascesis (or its derivatives) has, as we know, taken on a particular meaning that differs from the original.

Not only has it assumed an exclusively religious sense, but from the general tone of the faith that has come to predominate among Western peoples, asceticism is bound up with ideas of mortification of the flesh and of painful renunciation of the world: it has thus come to represent the method that this faith usually advocates as the most suitable for gaining "salvation" and the reconciliation of man, weighed down by original sin, with his Creator. As early as the beginnings of Christianity the name "ascetic" was applied to those who practiced mortification by flagellation of the body.

Thus, with the growth of modern civilization, all that asceticism stood for gradually and inevitably became the object of strong dislike. If even Luther, with the resentment of one unable to understand or tolerate monastic disciplines, could refuse to recognize the necessity, value, and usefulness of any ascesis, and could substitute it by exaltation of pure faith, then humanism, immanency, and the new life cult were brought from their standpoint to heap discredit and scorn upon asceticism, broadly associating such tendencies with "medieval obscurantism" and with the aberrations of "historically outdated ages."

And even when asceticism was not dismissed out of hand as pathological or as a kind of sublimated masochism, all sorts of incompatibilities to our ways of life were affirmed. The best known and most overworked of these is the antithesis supposed to exist between the ascetic, static, and emasculated Orient, renouncer and enemy of the world, and the dynamic, positive, heroic, and progressive Western civilization.

Unfortunate prejudices such as these have succeeded in gaining a foothold in people's minds; even Friedrich Nietzsche sometimes seriously believed that asceticism only attracted the "pallid enemies of life," the weak and disinherited, and those who, in their hatred of themselves and the world, undermine with their ideas the civilizations created by a superior humanity. Furthermore, recent attempts have been made to provide "climatic" explanations of asceticism. Thus, according to Gunther, the Indo-Germans, under the influence of an enervating and unaccustomed climate in the Asiatic lands they had conquered, came slowly to regard the world as suffering,

turning their energies away from affirmation of life and toward a seeking for "liberation" by means of various ascetic disciplines. We need hardly discuss the low level to which asceticism has been brought by recent "psychoanalytical" interpretations.

In the West, then, a tight net of misunderstanding and prejudice has been drawn round asceticism. The one-sided meaning given to asceticism by Christianity, through its frequent association therein with entirely misguided forms of spiritual life, has produced inevitable reactions: these have usually—and not without a certain anti-traditional and anti-religious bias—stressed only the negative side of what one kind of ascesis has to offer the "modern" spirit.

Our own contemporaries, however, as though the position were inverted, are now again using expressions of this nature in the original sense, though adapting them to their own entirely materialistic plane. Thus we hear of a "mystique of progress," a "mystique of science," a "mystique of labor" and so on, and likewise of an ascesis of sport, an ascesis of social service and even of an ascesis of capitalism. In spite of the confusion of ideas, there is definitely to be found here a certain element of the original meaning of the word ascesis: this modern use of the word or its derivatives does, in fact, imply the simple idea of training, of intensive application of energy, not without a certain impersonality and neutralization of the purely individual and hedonistic element.

Be that as it may, it is important at the present time that intelligent people should once again understand the value of asceticism in a comprehensive view of the universe and thus what it may signify at successive spiritual levels, independently of the mere religious concepts of a Christian type as well as of the modern distinctions; for which they should refer to the fundamental traditions and the highest metaphysical concepts of the Aryan races. As we wished to discuss asceticism in this sense, we asked ourselves: what example can history furnish as the best suited for examination as a comprehensive and universal ascetic system that is clear and undiluted, well tried and well set out, in tune with the spirit of Aryan man and yet prevailing in the modern age?

We eventually decided that the answer to our question could only be found in the "Doctrine of Awakening," which, in its original form, satisfies all these conditions.

The "Doctrine of Awakening" is the real signification of what is commonly known as Buddhism. The term Buddhism is derived from the Pali designation Buddha (Sanskrit: Buddha) given to its founder; it is, however, not so much a name as a title. Buddha, from the root budh, "to awaken," means the "Awakened One": it is thus a designation applied to one who attains the spiritual realization, likened to an "arousing" or to an "awakening," which Prince Siddhattha announced to the Indo-Aryan world. Buddhism, in its original form—the so-called Pali Buddhism—shows us, as do very few other doctrines, the characteristics we want: (1) it contains a complete ascetic system; (2) it is universally valid and it is realistic; (3) it is purely Aryan in spirit; (4) it is accessible in the general conditions of the historical cycle to which present-day humankind also belongs.

We have implied that asceticism, when considered as a whole, can assume various meanings at successive spiritual levels. Simply defined, that is to say as "training" or discipline, an ascesis aims at placing all the energies of the human being under the control of a central principle. In this respect we can, properly speaking, talk of a technique that has, in common with that of modern scientific achievements, the characteristics of objectivity and impersonality. Thus an eye, trained to distinguish the accessory from the essential, can easily recognize a "constant" beyond the multiple variety of ascetic forms adopted by this or that tradition.

In the first place, we can consider as accessory all the particular religious conceptions or the particular ethical interpretations with which, in very many cases, asceticism is associated. Beyond all this, however, it is possible to conceive of and to work out what we may call a pure ascesis, that is to say, one made up of techniques for developing an interior force, the use of which, to begin with, remains undetermined, like the use of the arms and machines produced by modern industrial techniques. Thus, while "ascetic" reinforcement of the personality is the foundation of every transcendental realization, whether in the form of one historical tradition or another, it can likewise be of great value on the level of the temporal aspirations and struggles that absorb practically all the energies of modern Western people.

Further-more, we could even conceive of an "ascesis of evil," for the technical conditions, as we may call them, needed to achieve any positive success in the direction of the "evil" are not different in kind from those needed, for example, to attain sainthood. Nietzsche himself, as we have already pointed out, partly shared the modern wide-spread prejudice against asceticism: when dealing with his "Superman" and when formulating the *Wille zur Macht*, did he not take into account various disciplines and forms of self-control that are clearly of an ascetic nature? Thus, at least within certain limits, we can quote the words of an old medieval tradition: "One the Art, One the Material, One the Crucible."

Principles

Now, few other great historical traditions allow us to isolate so easily the elements of a pure ascesis as does the 'Doctrine of Awakening,' that is to say, Buddhism. It has been justly said of Buddhism that in it the ascetic problems "have been stated and resolved so clearly and, one could almost say, so logically that, in comparison, other forms of mysticism seem incomplete, fragmentary and inconclusive"; and that, far from being weighed down by every kind of emotional and sentimental element, an austere and objective style of intellectual clarity so much predominates that one is almost forced to compare it with the modern scientific mentality. In this respect two points must be emphasized.

First, the Buddhist ascesis is conscious, in the sense that in many forms of asceticism—and in the case of Christian asceticism almost without exception—the accessory is inextricably tied up with the essential, and ascetic realizations are, one might say, indirect because they result from impulses and workings of the mind determined by religious suggestions or raptures; while in

Buddhism there is direct action, based on knowledge, conscious of its aim and developing throughout in controlled stages. "Just as a practiced turner or turner's apprentice, when turning quickly, knows 'I am turning quickly,' and when turning slowly, knows 'I am turning slowly"'; and "as a practiced butcher or butcher's apprentice who butchers a cow, takes it to the market-place and dissects it piece by piece; he knows these parts, he looks at them and examines them well and then sits down"—here are two trenchant similes, chosen from many, and typical of the style of consciousness of every ascetic or contemplative procedure in the Doctrine of Awakening.'

Another image is furnished by clear and transparent water through which can be seen everything lying on the bottom: symbolical of a mind that has left behind all unrest and disturbance.³

And it will be seen that this style persists throughout, on every level of Buddhist discipline. It has been well said that "this path through consciousness and awakening is as clearly described as a road on an accurate map, along which every tree, every bridge and every house is marked."⁴

Second, Buddhism is almost the only system that avoids confusion between asceticism and morality, and in which the purely instrumental value of the latter in the interests of the former is consciously realized. Every ethical precept is measured against an independent scale, that is, according to the positive "ascetic" effects that result from following these precepts or failing to follow them. From this it can be seen that not only have all religious mythologies been surpassed, but also all ethical mythologies. In Buddhism, the elements of silt, that is, of "right conduct," are considered purely as "instruments of the mind":⁵ it is not a question of "values" but of "instruments," instruments of a *virtus*, not in the moralistic sense but in the ancient sense of virile energy.

Here we have the well-known parable of the raft: a man, wishing to cross a dangerous river and having built a raft for this purpose, would indeed be a fool if, when he had crossed, he were to put the raft on his shoulders and take it with him on his journey. This must be the attitude—Buddhism teaches—to all that is labelled by ethical views as good or evil, just or unjust.

Thus we can fairly claim that in Buddhism—as also in yoga—asceticism is raised to the dignity and impersonality of a science: what is elsewhere fragmentary here becomes systematic; what is instinct becomes conscious technique; the spiritual labyrinth of those minds that achieve a real elevation through the workings of some "grace" (since it is only accidentally and by means of suggestions, fears, hopes, and raptures that they discover the right way) is replaced by a calm and uniform light, present even in abysmal depths, and by a method that has no need of external means.

All this, however, refers only to the first aspect of asceticism, the most elementary in the ascetic hierarchy. When an ascesis is understood as a technique for the conscious creation of a force that can be applied, in the first place, at any level, then the disciplines taught by the Doctrine of Awakening can be recognized as those that incorporate the highest degree of crystallinity and

independence. However, we en-counter inside the system a distinction between the disciplines that "suffice for this life" and those that are necessary to take one beyond.¹

Ascetic achievement in Buddhism is exploited essentially in an upward direction. This is how the sense of such achievements is expressed in the canon:

"And he reaches the admirable path discovered by the intensity,
the constancy and the concentration of the will,
the admirable path discovered by the intensity,
the constancy and the concentration of the energy,
the admirable path discovered by the intensity,
the constancy and the concentration of the spirit,
the admirable path discovered by the intensity,
the constancy and the concentration of investigation—with a heroic spirit as the fifth."

And this continues: "And thus attaining these fifteen heroic qualities, he is able, O disciples, to achieve liberation, to achieve awakening, to attain the incomparable sureness."⁸ In this connection another text considers a double possibility: "Either certainty in life, or no return after death."⁹ If, on the highest level, "sureness" is linked with the state of "awakening," the alternatives can be similarly interpreted on a lower level, and we may think of a more relative sureness in life, created by a preliminary group of ascetic disciplines and able to prove its value in all fields of life, and yet that is essentially a foundation for an ascesis of a higher nature. It is in this sense that we can talk of an "intensive application," which is considered to be the keystone of the whole system and which, when "developed and constantly practised, leads to two-fold health, health in the present and health in the future."¹⁰ "Sureness," in ascetic development—bhāvanā—is associated with unshakable calm—samatha—which may be considered as the highest aim of a "neutral" discipline, and which can be pursued by one who yet remains essentially a "son of the world"—putthujjana. Beyond this there is an unshakable calm—samatha—which is associated with knowledge—vipassanā—and which then leads to "liberation."

Here we have, then, a new conception of the ascesis, on a higher plane than the last, and taking us to a level above normal perception and individual experience; and at the same time it becomes clear why Buddhism, on this higher level also, gives us positive points of reference such as we find in few other traditions. The fact is that Buddhism in its original form carefully avoids anything that savours of simple "religion," of mysticism in its most generally accepted sense, of systems of "faith" or devotion, or of dogmatic rigidity. And even when we consider that which is no longer of that life, that which is "more than life," Buddhism, as the Doctrine of Awakening, offers us those very traits of severity and nudity that characterize the monumental, and features of clarity and strength that may be called, in a general sense, "classical"; a virile and courageous

attitude that would seem Promethean were it not in-deed essentially Olympian. But before this can be appreciated, once again various prejudices must be removed. And here it is well to discuss two points.

It has been claimed that Buddhism, in its essentials, and leaving out of account its later popular forms, entirely centred as they were on a deified concept of its founder, is not a religion. This is true. We must, however, be quite clear as to what we mean when we say this. The peoples of the West are so inured to the religion that has come to predominate in their countries that they consider it as a kind of unit of measure and as a model for every other religion: they are near denying the dignity of true religion to any concept of the supersensory and to man's relationship to it, when the concept in any way differs from the Judeo-Christian type. The result of this has been that the most ancient traditions of the West itself—beginning with the Aryo-Hellenic and the Aryo-Roman—are no longer understood in their real significance

II. In Angutt., 4.170 it is said that the bonds give way and the path opens when samatha is combined with vipassana or effective value;¹² so it is easy to imagine what happened to older and often more remote traditions, particularly to those created by the Aryan races in Asia. But, in-deed, this attitude should be reversed: and just as "modem" civilization is an anomaly when compared with what has always been true civilization," so the significance and the value of the Christian religion should be measured according to that part of its content that is consonant with a vaster, more Aryan, and more primordial concept of the supersensory.

We need not dwell on this point since we have already dealt with it elsewhere; Dahlke sums up the matter, saying that one characteristic of Western superficiality is the tendency always to identify religion as a whole with religion based on faith.¹⁴

Beyond those who "believe" are those who "know," and to these the purely "mythological" character of many simply religious, devotional, and even scholastically theological concepts is quite clear. It is largely a question of different degrees of knowledge.

Religion, from religo, is, as the word itself indicates, a reconnecting and, more specifically, a reconnecting of a creature to a Creator with the eventual introduction of a mediator or of an expiator. On the basis of this central idea can be built up a whole system of faith, devotion, and even mysticism that, admittedly, is capable of carrying an individual to a certain level of spiritual realization. However, it does so to a large extent passively since it is based essentially on sentiment, emotion, and suggestion. In such a system no amount of scholastic explaining will ever completely resolve the irrational and subintellectual element.

We can easily understand that in some cases such "religious" forms are necessary; and even the East, in later periods, has known something of the kind, for in-stance, the way of devotion—bhakti-marga (from bhaj, "to adore")—of Ramānuja and certain forms of the Sakti cult: but we must also realize that there may be some who have no need of them and who, by race and by calling, desire a way free from "religious" mythologies, a way based on clear knowledge,

realization, and awakening. An ascetic, whose energies are employed in this direction, achieves the highest form of ascesis; and Buddhism gives us an example of an ascesis that is outstanding of its kind—in saying "of its kind" we wish to point out that Buddhism represents a great historical tradition with texts and teachings available to all; it is not an esoteric school with its knowledge reserved for a restricted number of initiates.

In this sense we can, and indeed we must, state that Buddhism—referring always to original Buddhism—is not a religion. This does not mean that it denies supernatural and metaphysical reality, but only that it has nothing to do with the way of regarding one's relationship with this reality that we know more or less as "religion." The validity of these statements would in no way be altered were one to set out in greater detail to defend the excellence of the theistic point of view against Buddhism, by charging the Doctrine of Awakening with more or less declared atheism. This brings us to the second point for discussion, but which we need only touch upon here as it is dealt with at length later in this work.

We have admitted that a "religiously" conceived system can carry an individual to a certain level of spiritual realization. The fact that this system is based on a theistic concept determines this level. The theistic concept, however, is by no means either unique or even the highest "religious" relationship such as the Hindu bhakti or the predominant faiths in the Western or Arab world. Whatever one may think of it, the theistic concept represents an incomplete view of the world, since it lacks the extreme hierarchic apex. From a metaphysical and (in the higher sense) traditional point of view, the notion on which theism is based of representing "being" in a personal form even when theologically sublimated, can never claim to be the ultimate ideal. The concept and the realization of the extreme apex or, in other words, of that which is beyond both such a "being" and its opposite, "non-being," was and is natural to the Aryan spirit. It does not deny the theistic point of view but recognizes it in its rightful hierarchic place and subordinates it to a truly transcendental concept.

It is freely admitted that things are less simple than they seem in Western theology, especially in the realm of mysticism, and more particularly where it is concerned with so called "negative theology." Also in the West the notion of a personal God occasionally merges into the idea of an ineffable essence, of an abysmal divinity, as the *év* conceived by the Neo-platonists beyond the *óv*, as the Gottheit in the neuter beyond the Gott, which, after Dionysius the Areopagite, appeared frequently in German mysticism and which exactly corresponds with the neuter Brahman above the theistic Brahman of Hindu speculation. But in the West it is more a notion wrapped in a confused mystical cloud than a precise doctrinal and dogmatic definition conforming to a comprehensive cosmic system. And this notion, in point of fact, has had little or no effect on the "religious" bias prevalent in the Western mind: its only result has been to carry a few men, confused in their occasional intuitions and visions, beyond the frontiers of "orthodoxy."

That very apex that Christian theology loses in a confused background is, in-stead, very often placed consciously in the foreground by the Aryo-Oriental traditions. To talk in this respect of atheism or even of pantheism betrays ignorance, an ignorance shared by those who spend their

time unearthing oppositions and anti-theses. The truth is that the traditions of the Aryans who settled in the East retain and conserve much of what the later traditions of races of the same root who settled in the West have lost or no longer understand or retain only fragmentarily. A contributing factor here is the undoubtedly influence on European faiths of concepts of Semitic and Asiatic-Mediterranean origin.

Thus to accuse of atheism the older traditions, particularly the Doctrine of Awakening, and also other Western traditions that reflect the same spirit, only betrays an attempt to expose and discredit a higher point of view on the part of a lower one: an attempt that, had circumstances been reversed, would have been qualified out of hand by the religious West as Satanic.

And, in fact, we shall see that it was exactly thus that it appeared to the doctrine of the Buddha (cf. p. 85-86).

The recognition of that which is "beyond both 'being' and 'non-being'" opens to ascetic realization possibilities unknown to the world of theism. The fact of reaching the apex, in which the distinction between "Creator" and "creature" becomes meta-physically meaningless, allows of a whole system of spiritual realizations that, since it leaves behind the categories of "religious" thought, is not easily understood: and, above all, it permits a direct ascent, that is, an ascent up the bare mountainside, without support and without useless excursions to one side or another. This is the exact meaning of the Buddhist asceticism; it is no longer a system of disciplines designed to generate strength, sureness, and unshakable calm, but a system of spiritual realization. Buddhism—and again later we shall see this distinctly—carries the will for the unconditioned to a limit that is almost beyond the imagination of the modern Westerner. And in this ascent beside the abyss the climber rejects all "mythologies," he proceeds by means of pure strength, he ignores all mirages, he rids himself of any residual human weakness, he acts only according to pure knowledge. Thus the Awakened One (Buddha), the Victor (Jina) could be called he whose way was unknown to men, angels, and to Brahma himself (the Sanskrit name for the theistic god). Admittedly, this path is not without dangers, yet it is the path open to the virile mind—viriya-magga. The texts clearly state that the doctrine is "for the wise man, the ex-pert, not for the ignorant, the inexpert."¹⁵ The simile of the cutting grass is used: "As kusa grass when wrongly grasped cuts the hand, so the ascetic life wrongly practised leads to infernal torments."¹⁶ The simile of the serpent is used: "As a man who wants serpents goes out for serpents, looks for serpents, and finding a powerful serpent grasps it by the body or by the tail; and the serpent striking at him bites his hand or arm or other part so that he suffers death or mortal anguish—and why is this? Because he wrongly grasped the serpent—so there are men who are harmed by the doctrines. And why is this? Because they wrongly grasped the doctrines."

It must be thus quite clear that the Doctrine of Awakening is not itself one particular religion that is opposed to other religions. Even in the world in which it grew, it respected the various divinities and the popular cults of religious type that were attached to them. It understood the value of "works." Virtuous and devout men go to "heaven"—but a different path is taken by the Awakened Ones.' They go beyond as "a fire which, little by little, consumes every bond," both

human and divine. And it is fundamentally an innate attribute of the Aryan soul that causes us never to meet in the Buddhist texts any sign of departure from consciousness, of sentimentalism or devout effusion, or of semi intimate conversation with a God, although throughout there is a sense of strength inexorably directed toward the unconditioned.

We have now elaborated the first three reasons why Buddhism in particular is so suitable as a base for an exposition of a complete asceticism. Summing up: the first is the possibility of extracting easily from Buddhism the elements of an asceticism considered as an objective technique for the achievement of calm, strength, and detached superiority, capable in themselves of being used in all directions. The second is that in Buddhism the asceticism has also the superior signification of a path of spiritual realization quite free from any mythology, whether religious, theological, or ethical. The third reason, finally, is that the last stretch of such a path corresponds to the Supreme in a truly metaphysical concept of the universe, to a real transcendence well beyond the purely theistic concept. Thus while the Buddha considers the tendency to dogmatize as a bond, and opposes the empty sufficiency of those who proclaim: "Only this is truth, foolishness is the rest,"²⁰ yet he maintains firmly the knowledge of his own dignity: "Perhaps you may wish, disciples, thus knowing, thus understanding, to re-turn for your salvation to the rites and the fantasies of the ordinary penitent or priest?" "No, indeed," is the answer. "Is it thus then, disciples: that you speak only of that on which you yourselves have meditated, which you yourselves have known, which you yourselves have understood?" "Even so, Master."

"This is well, disciples. Re-main, then, endowed with this doctrine, which is visible in this life, timeless, inviting, leading onward, intelligible to all intelligent men. If this has been said, for this reason has it been said."²¹ And again: "There are penitents and priests who exalt liberation. They speak in various manners glorifying liberation. But as for that which concerns the most noble, the highest liberation, I know that none equals me, let alone that 1 may be surpassed."²² This has been called, in the tradition, "the lion's roar."

1. B. Jansilk. *La mistica del buddismo* (Turin, 1925). p. 304.
2. Majjhima-nikāya, 10.
3. Cf., e.g., *Jātaka*, 185.
4. E. Reinholt. in the introduction to the works of K. E. Neumann. quoted by (i. de Lorenzo, *I discordi di Buddha* (Bari. 1925), vol. 2, p. 15.
5. Majjh., 53.
6. Ibid.. 22.
7. Cf., e.g., Majjh., 53.
8. Majjh., 16.
9. Ibid.. 10.
10. Anguttara-nikāya, 3.65: 1(1.15. Cf. Samyutt., 35.198, where the disciplines are stated to be

valid for this life since, in it, they create self-possession, and yet build the firm foundations for the destruction of the asava. that is, for the task of following the upward path.

12. Cf. W. F. Otto, *Die Getter Griechenlands* (1935), 1, 2, and *passim*.
13. Cf. R. Guenon. *Orient et Occident* (Paris, 1924): *La Crise du monde moderne* (Paris, 1925). [English translations: *East and West* (London, 1941). and *The Crisis of the Modern World* (London, 1943)].
14. P. Dahlke., *Buddhismus als Religion und Moral* (Munich and Neubiberg, 1923), p. 15.
Majjh. 2.
16. *Dhammapada*, 311.
17. Majjh., 22.

The States Free from Form and the Extinction

The region of the later realizations of the Ariya, up till the great liberation, corresponds to the arupa world. Having overcome sensible existence (kāma-lupa) having overcome the possibility of rearising in the world of pure forms (rupa-loka) one still must proceed, if one has the power, to the overcoming of existence free from form (arupa-loka) and of the "desire" of which it may be the object (arupa-rāga). By arupa-loka, we must understand the sphere in which only that which is "essence" remains, only pure possibility of manifestation, or "meaning": while the formal and manifested aspect, which may, among other ways, manifest itself through the phenomena of supersensory vision, entirely falls away. From the individual's point of view, this is the space that extends beyond the fourth *nidāna*, nāma-rupa, that is to say, beyond individuation. Dissociation from the *samsāric* being occurs when we enter into this higher ascetic and transcendental region, in which we still have to remove the first three *nidāna* of the series: firstly, *vinnāna*, understood as both the general possibility of a definite and dependent existence, and also the absolutely original motus that may lead to such an existence, in its double aspect of "non-wisdom" (*avijjā*) and of intoxicated energy, *sankhāra* and *āsava*.

In the same way that, after the phase of defence, consolidation and preliminary detachment, the ascetic was offered two nearly equivalent paths, namely, the four *jhāna* and the four irradiant contemplations, so, in this final development, a twofold path is again offered. The first of these is by way of completely abstract contemplations "without form" and is developed, in fact, in the same sense as the aforesaid *jhāna*; indeed, the term *arupa-jhāna* is often used here. The other path, on the contrary, is made up of special illuminating visions—*abhiinna*—and is imbued much more with the spirit of the irradiant contemplations.

Before we deal with these paths, it will be profitable to take the opportunity of referring to certain initial techniques and instruments that are considered by Buddhism as auxiliary and preparatory means—*parikamma-nimitta*—both for the *jhāna* we have yet to speak of, and for

those we have already discussed. The texts speak of eight "liberations" (vimokkhā), five of which are the āyatana, that is, the contemplative states of the region "without form," while three are clearly contemplations preliminary to them. In the first of these latter contemplations one considers, in one's own being, the single element "form," and one completely concentrates one's mind upon it: this is not entirely unrelated to some methods known among ancient Mediterranean initiations and associated with the formula: "to go out (from the body, from individual consciousness) through the skin." To feel only the "form" of one's own organism is like feeling its surface, the "skin." According to those ancient mystic teachings, to isolate this sensation of the "form" and almost to lose oneself in it can, in certain cases, be a way of "going out." And it is a method of Tibetan yoga firstly to identify one's body with that of a divinity and then to apprehend it as empty, as if it were made only of a shining and transparent skin.¹ The second "liberation" consists of forgetting one's own form, one's own body, and absorbing oneself instead in an outside form, which alone must engage the mind and the sensibility. This is connected with the technique of the kasina that we are just about to discuss. The third "liberation" is connected with "splendor" and "beauty"—there are even texts that consider that these two elements only are the supports in the passage to the form-less.² There thus appears on the scene something that recalls the part played by aesthetic feeling in the Platonist and Neoplatonist mystiques, namely, a kind of enthusiasm or rapture that acts as a vehicle for the attaining of the supersensible.

The difference is that here we are not dealing with the joy of the artist or of the lover of art, but rather with a quintessential and abstract feeling that is roused, not by an image or a living creature or an aspect of nature, but simply by a pure colour, light, brilliance, or fire in a mind that has already been brought to the limit of purely individual and human consciousness as the result of the ascesis we have so far described. This refers to the kasina themselves.

The term kasina means, literally, "totality." It denotes a procedure that would be described today as "hypnotic," a procedure by means of which consciousness is led to become absorbed by identification in an object, until they form together a "wholeness," one single thing. This process of identification produces isolation of the mind not only from physical impressions but also from one's own person: the "five hindrances" being overcome, the passage to the abstract contemplations is made easier or hastened.

As to technique: one may start with a disc of some perfectly pure color, dark blue, yellow, red, or white, which is placed in front of the person who is to perform the exercise. Alternatively, a round opening can be made, through which an area of bright sky may be seen, or the same can be done in a screen placed in front of a fire in such a manner that a disc of flame is visible. In one way or another, one must arrange to have before one a regular shape occupied by a pure and even colour or luminosity. The mind should be detached from all longing or worry and should warm to the thought of the truth and of the awakening of the Ariyas. Thus the mind is prepared for concentration and is pervaded by the thought that the action about to be undertaken will facilitate the grace of the mind's own liberation. After this is done, one must gaze fixedly at the luminous disc, "with eyes neither too widely open nor half-closed, as one looks at oneself in a mirror,"

without interruption, without blinking, concentrating wholly on this perception, until there is created a false image (today we would say, an hallucinatory image) of the shape. One must then continue to concentrate on this image, with the eyes both open and closed, if necessary "a hundred or a thousand times," until the mental image is established in such a way that one continues to see it even involuntarily, with the eyes closed or open and with the gaze removed from the object. The first phase of the operation is complete when the "reflex," the mental counterpart of the physical image of the disc, called *uggaha-nimitta*, is equally visible with the eyes open or closed. One can then stop sitting in front of the disc and pass on to the second phase of the exercise.

In this further phase the "reflex" must, in its turn, serve as the basis for concentration that is now, in a manner of speaking, of the second degree. It is no longer the physical eye that fixes its gaze, but the eye that has been opened by the 7na—*jhāna-cakkhu*. The procedure, however, is the same: one again has to identify oneself with the mental image, forgetting everything else, just as was done previously with the image provided by the senses. If this second concentration on the interior image is rightly carried out, there finally springs out from this image a new reflex of the second degree, something purely spiritual—*patibhāga-nimitta*—"without form, without colour." This resembles the melting of a fog, or the shining of the morning star, or the appearance of the moon from behind clouds, or is like the flash of a mirror taken from its case, or of a perfectly polished gem.

These terms are used to describe the appearance of the new image that "shatters" and annihilates the preceding "hallucinatory" image, and "rises, a hundred, a thousand times more clear." At the moment when this experience occurs, the obstacle formed by one's own individuality and by the "five bonds" is removed, the power of the *āsava* is neutralized, and the passage of the mind to the apprehension of the states free from form, or of pure forms, is made easier.⁴

The so-called light *kasina* is appreciably different; it is indicated in the texts thus: "The ascetic fixes his attention on perception of light, he fixes his mind on the perception of day: as by day so by night, as by night so by day. Thus he trains himself, with his mind aware, untroubled, in the contemplation of light." Correctly and constantly practiced, this exercise should ease the opening of the "eye of wisdom."⁵

Another process of "emptying" is more mental in character and is based on successive abstractions. Forgetting oneself and one's connection with common human existence, one allows only the image "forest," for example, to remain, as if it were the only thing in the world that existed, until the spirit is relaxed, made firm, and freed. This produces a feeling of "voidness," of "real, inviolable vacancy"—*sunnatā*. One then drops the idea of forest, leaving as the only object for the mind the idea of "earth," putting aside, however, all its characteristics; "as the hide of a bull is well cleaned with a scraper, and its wrinkles smoothed out," there exists nothing but "earth" in the world. And one apprehends the same feeling of liberty, or voidness, in conceiving that only the idea "earth" persists as support of the mind. From "earth" one finally moves to the

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idea "infinite space"—with which one achieves the passage to the object of the first arupa and meditation, that is to say, of the first of the meditations beyond form.

Before going any further, we must forestall any misunderstandings that may arise regarding the implications of these forms of approach that are based on what is almost a hypnotic technique. It is quite possible that those idle people who go in search of "occult exercises," of short-cuts by which to reach the supersensible without effort, may believe that they have found something on these lines in the colour and light kasina, they may then mistakenly believe that by practicing a form of hypnosis they can do without any renunciation, discipline, or spiritual effort. This would be a grave mistake. These material procedures mean very little in themselves: their only purpose is to neutralize peripheral sensitivity. It is then a question of seeing, firstly, if something of consciousness still remains, once the neutralization has been achieved; and secondly, if it does, what is the nature of any experience that may result. Everyone knows that procedures similar to those of the colour and light kasina have been used both in the practice of magic and by visionaries, and in modern times, among forms of experimental hypnosis. The technique of the "magic mirror" will be familiar to some, a technique that consists of gazing at a luminous point reflected by a curved mirror: others will be acquainted with the practice of "divination," based on fixing the sight on a mirror or water or on the fire.

We can see from this that the technique of the kasina, in itself, is neutral, and may produce one or another result, without in itself determining which.

Thus, except for cases of privileged and exceptional predispositions, anyone with sufficient power of concentration will find that the effect of staring at the coloured discs or at the discs of light will be merely hypnotic, that is to say, that he will descend to a semisomnambulistic state of reduced consciousness like that of people who are hypnotized. In others, "complexes" of all descriptions may emerge and be projected, resulting in inconclusive visions that may even be dangerous, because not only do they not lead beyond individuality, but they may even disclose and bring up a psychic "sub-soil" and so open the way to the manifestation of obscure influences. Yet, others, once they have mastered the exercise, or if they have special natural gifts, may utilize the state of trance into which they pass for the purpose of divining or magic. Lastly, the best that can happen is that apparitions of "divine forms" may occur, of forms belonging to the rupa loka that, however, as we have already said, is itself left behind by the path of awakening of the Ariya.

For the effective use of the technique in question, the first condition is that consciousness should be already concentrated and detached and capable of maintaining itself by its own efforts: only then, when the peripheral sensitivity has been neutralized, can one keep one's feet, can one go up rather than down, can one set out to attain a purified superconsciousness instead of sinking into the morass of the visionary or low-grade medium. In the second place one needs, as we said, adequate spiritual tension, pervaded by the idea of awakening, almost like the state of a compressed spring on the point of release. In this connection a text states that, as a man with a robust digestion swallows and consumes a spoonful of rice without difficulty, so one who aspires

to transcendental wisdom goes beyond the initial act of concentration on the image, absorbs it and transcends it, and achieves the state at which he aims.⁹ No one, then, should nourish any illusions about the techniques we have discussed by thinking that they are capable of producing, in the way of genuine spiritual realization, anything more than he has already.

They can only create, quickly and conveniently, conditions that favour a particular action that, in itself, presupposes a high development of ascetic, "holy," or initiatic consciousness. The same is also true, although in a lesser degree, of the other, less mechanical forms of approach of which we have spoken: when we are dealing with the path of awakening of the Ariya, a "nobility" and a special internal initiative are always presupposed. Even the continued contemplation of light can lead to little more than hallucinations, instead of to the opening of the "eye of wisdom," if we do not have a living and, in a manner of speaking, intellectualized sensation of this light (intellectual light). There is confirmation of this in the fact that the same practice is sometimes advised for wholly contingent purposes, for example, as an antidote to sleep and torpor.¹⁰

As the starting point for the five jhāna free from form we have, on the one hand.

objective detachment from the perceptions of the six senses and, on the other, "pure, clear, ductile, flexible, resplendent indifference" in which the series of jhāna we have already considered as well as the series of irradiant contemplations, both culminate.

Having made this clear, this is how the texts refer to the contemplative states.

First phase: "Completely transcending perceptions of form, making the reflex images vanish, reducing every perception of multiplicity, the ascetic thinks: 'infinite ether' and reaches the plane of infinite ether."

Second phase: "After completely transcending the plane of infinite ether, in the thought: 'infinity of consciousness' the ascetic reaches the plane of infinity of consciousness."

Third phase: "After completely transcending the plane of infinity of consciousness, in the thought: 'non-existence' the ascetic reaches the plane of non-existence."

Fourth phase: "After completely transcending the plane of non-existence, the ascetic reaches the plane beyond consciousness and non-consciousness."

Fifth phase: "After completely transcending the plane beyond consciousness and non-consciousness, the ascetic reaches the cessation of the determined."¹⁰ At this point, it is said, the "mania" of the illuminated ascetic is destroyed, the āsava are dissolved, there subsists no longer any "gross or subtle bond"; there is, on the contrary, a flash of absolute liberating knowledge. For this interior vision, which destroys at the root any possibility of conditioned existence, the canonical formula is this: "'This is agitation' (dukkha), so comprehends the ascetic, knowing the truth; 'This is the genesis of agitation'; 'This is the destruction of agitation'; 'This is the path which leads to the destruction of agitation.' 'This is mania' (āsava), so comprehends the ascetic, conforming to truth, This is the genesis of mania'; 'This is the destruction of mania'; 'This is the path which leads to the destruction of mania' so he sees, conforming to the truth. Thus knowing,

thus seeing, his spirit becomes freed from the mania of desire [kāmāsava], from the mania of existence [bhavā-sava], from the mania of ignorance [avijjāsava]. 'In the liberated one is liberation,' this knowledge arises. 'Exhausted is life, the divine path realised, that which had to be done has been done, this world no longer exists' does he then comprehend.' The culmination is reached, reintegration has been carried out, life and death are overcome, every thirst is ended, the primordial anguish—the trembling and the burning—is destroyed.

A few words of explanation on these transcendental phases of the ascesis: in the formula of the first arupa -jhāna the perceptions of form that are to be overcome are indicated by the term patighasannā, which contains the idea of something that resists.

This relates in some degree to experience governed by the law of opposition of object to subject, feeling oneself "I" by contraposition to a non-I, to an object-um, to a Gegenstand (something that stands against me, that opposes me). This confirms the idea that, in order to enter into the world that is free from form, one must be capable of really abandoning this consciousness of self as an individual "I," conditioned by a particular "name-and-form," which endures just because of this law. And since all that is individual in an immediate and effective sense is supposed already to have been overcome by means of the preceding catharsis, there remains to be eliminated only the subtle residue of "I" that persists, as one text says, in the same way as the scent remains even when the flower that has produced it is no longer there.¹² As for the "reflex images" that have also to be eliminated in this phase, these refer to the secondary reflected images, void of form, subtle and wholly intellectual, that are obtained by the colour and light kasina. When this reflex image is also suppressed, in the state of "voidness" that comes to be present, the thought "infinite ether" leads to the apprehension of the plane of infinite ether.

Akāsa (Skt.: akasa) is frequently translated as "space" instead of as "ether." This can only cause a misunderstanding. In the Indo-Aryan tradition, ākāsa means essentially what "Quintessence," the "Fifth Element," the "Ether-Light," the aour and so on meant in the ancient Western traditions. It is not three-dimensional physical and mathematical space, but something that stands in relation to it as does spirit to body. Even etymologically the word ākāsa evokes the idea of "light." In a Upanisad, the brahman is understood as being identical with the "ether" both outside and inside the man." The ether is, rather, called the internal, essential side (ātma), while light is called the external side." In the jhāna in question the idea "infinity of space" can only serve as a basis for the evocation of space in its aspect of ākāsa, live and luminous infinite ether, and as a preliminary to the transformation of consciousness into ether, which is the first broadening out of pure "being," beyond the sphere of Brahma.

Having thus considered the object of the first āyatana, the passage to the second, whose object is "infinity of consciousness," is quite natural. It is, in fact, a question of overcoming the residue of outsideness and of "cosmicity" present in the experience of ākāsa. The term used is vinnānāncāyatana and it is related to the second nidāna of the descending series, in the sense of being a "purification" of it. We have conceived the nidāna "consciousness" in terms of a determined manifestation. To cut off the bond that it represents, we must pass over to the third

āyatana or arupa-jhāna, whose object is experience of the sphere of "nonexistence. "

This sphere must be understood as the negative counterpart of "consciousness," that is, the power of non-manifestation or relative to that of manifestation, whose principle is "consciousness." The experience of the āyatana can also be denoted by the formula "nothing exists," since to penetrate the power of non-manifestation means to apprehend in everything the possibility of its nonexistence, the lack of its own reality, even in the case of him "in virtue of who everything that exists is." For this reason, some have conceived the experience in question as a liberation from Etwas-heit, from objectivity in general, extended even to the supercelestial spheres.

The state of the fourth āyatana is nevasannā-nāsannā or that which is neither consciousness (second āyatana) nor non-consciousness or non-being (third āyatana), that is to say, the element that is anterior to and higher than the two spheres previously realised. It is the "purification" of that which in the descending series corresponds to the "sankhāra"nidāna, that is to say, to the impulse that leads to "conception" in general, to the differentiation of possibility, insofar as it is a passive impulse.

The last āyatana leads to the ultimate point of the ἀπλωσίς, of the transcendental simplification or purification. Its state is denoted by the term sannā-vedayita-nirodha, which refers to "cessation" not only of the element "consciousness," but also of that which, on the plane of psychology, would correspond to perception, to perceptibility or elementary determinableness. It is a matter of going beyond the double category of being (manifestation, consciousness) and of non-being (non-manifestation) in order to attain every conceivable potentiality, conceivable, that is to say, beyond this double sphere of manifestation and non-manifestation. One achieves, then, the state of consciousness (to continue to use this term, although it has become quite inappropriate at this point) that is absolutely unchained, simple, and intact, the state that in the chain of nidāna precedes the primordial form of any determinableness whatsoever: we have quite clearly, therefore, the immediate antecedent of the complete destruction of the āsava and of "ignorance," and therefore the herald of the realization of extinction.

It is hardly necessary to say that, although each realization may be conceived on various planes and in varying degrees, here, even more than in the case of the four jhāna of the world of forms, any "psychologistic" interpretation must be resolutely rejected.

We can hardly take seriously the suggestion that we are dealing here with delvings into the semiconscious or into the "subliminal," until we reach an "oscillation about a zero-point in consciousness" (C. A. F. Rhys Davids).¹⁵ Reference even to the Leibnizian petites perceptions is entirely inadequate since the fact is that we are dealing with a "voyage" in superindividual and, in some ways, presamsāric states (anterior to association with a particular samsāric heredity), in which the transcendental causes of every conditioned existence are rooted.

For this reason the Buddhist teaching has "places" (Ioka) or "worlds" or "earths" (bhumikā) that correspond to the five āyatana, and it is held that one will rearise in this or that one of them at the level at which ascetic achievement has been arrested, instead of progressing to extinction and

absolute illumination."

With regard to the canonical formula for liberation, the term "Exhausted is life" implies the impossibility of any further form of conditioned existence, and not merely of "rebirth" in the grossly reincarnational sense. Similar also is the significance of the formula itthattāyāti pajānāti that, following Neumann and de Lorenzo, we have rendered as "He apprehends 'this world no longer exists'"—the world here being understood as the sum total of manifested forms, and therefore also as all that is implied in the Indo-Aryan doctrine by the "threefold world." As for the term bhavāsava, that is to say, āsava or "mania" of existence, this almost brings us to the same point, if by bhava we understand the "becoming" inherent in a "birth," and in the assuming of a conditioned form. But, in a broader and deeper sense, we may see in the destruction of this āsava the equivalent of what Germanic mysticism called Entwerdung the overcoming of "becoming" in general.

The realization of the Ariya leads beyond both "being" and "becoming." Together with "ignorance" and "craving"—the other two āsava—the bond of "becoming" is destroyed at the roots by the clear vision that arrives as a sudden flash of knowledge in face of dukkha, the primordial agitation and contingency, and which gives realization of the "incomparable safety," of the state wherein there is no more "becoming," which is the "end of the world," the end of "going," the end of birth and of death. Finally, the formula katam karanīyam, "that which had to be done has been done," is the extreme expression of the Ariyan nobility. The whole work has been done because it had to be done. There are no reasons. There are no rewards. It is natural for the man whose spirit is Ariyan to feel these values, to desire this undertaking. The right state, in the highest sense, is that of a being who no longer thirsts, who has extinguished craving, who has made his own the Olympian and sidereal nature, as in the origins.

In point of practice, what we have said of the character of "totality" of the kasina is valid also for the āyatana. The mind, entirely recollected and unattached, receives the basic idea of each āyatana— infinite ether, infinity of consciousness, etc.—and realizes its content in an experience that brings about the corresponding transformation.

To use a Buddhist simile, the spirit has become like a jar full to the brim with water, so that it only has to be tipped in one direction or another for the water immediately to overflow in that direction. Here, in the complete concentration of the inner being that is detached from the senses and from the bond of the samsaric "I," the images have the power of transformation: to think "infinite ether," "infinity of consciousness," "nonexistence," and so on, means to evoke the corresponding state, to transform the mind into that state, so that it undergoes the corresponding "infinitization" and liberation. We can, furthermore, say of the āyatana what we said of the jhāna, with reference both to actions that must have an almost spontaneous character, to the neutralization of any tendency toward identification, and finally to the burning process that in every state—even at these heights—discloses something that is conditioned and that may be overcome, thus urging one ever forward.'

This is about all that can be said of the five states of ascetic realization in the planes free from form. The indications concerning them in the texts are extremely schematic.

Here begins that silence, which will later be absolute—at least in original Buddhism—about the essence of the state of extinction, about nibbāna (Skt.: nirvāna), and about the destiny of the Awakened One after death.

We now have shortly to discuss the other path to extinction, the path considered by another series of texts and that is no longer given as a journey across the world beyond form, but rather in terms of special visions and corresponding "births."

For our point of departure we must refer back to the state of consciousness corresponding to the fourth jhāna or to the fourth irradiant contemplation, that is to say, to an extreme, purified equanimity. To the state of mind that the ascetic must assume in order to operate are attributed qualities similar to those of the "pure, clear, ductile, flexible, resplendent indifference." The fixed canonical formula is: "with firm, purified, tense, sincere, unblemished, malleable, ductile, compact, incorruptible mind." With such a mind one strives first of all for achievement of what is known as nana-dassana, the vision that comes from knowledge, having as its object one's own person, in its totality. It is, as it were, the uncoupling of oneself or, better still, a liberating of oneself by self-division, carried out by contemplation of oneself—both in one's own somatic reality and in one's subtle reality—as if one were another person or thing. In fact, it is said that after the fourth jhāna one must "hold fast, one must consider in one's mind and penetrate with one's vision the object of self-contemplation—paccavekkhana-nimitta—just as one man might look at another, the one standing looking at him who sits, the one sitting looking at him who stands."¹⁸ It is, then, an extreme intensification of the process that began with the various contemplations on the body and on the mind during the consolidation phase: a process that now passes on to an objective stage that is designed to eliminate completely the bond of "I" and that is distinguished by this characteristic: that which now does the contemplating is the almost ultrahuman mind of one who has reached the fourth jhāna or who has followed the path that leads to the possibility of a state of union with Brahmā. The formula of the disidentification or "projection" is: "This is my body, provided with form, made up of the four elements, generated by a father and by a mother, maintained in life by these foods.

It is impermanent, subject to change and decay, break-up and dissolution. And this also is my vinnāna from which it proceeds and to which it is bound." A simile is given: as though on a cloth there lay a gem, a very pure, resplendent, clear, transparent, perfectly cut and faceted jewel, wholly excellent; there might he tied to it a thread, blue or yellow, red or white, and as though a man with good sight, taking it in his hand, were to consider it and see clearly how the one thing was joined to the other. This simile, taken from Sāmkhya, shows that it is a question of "exteriorizing" one's own person in its entirety: the term vinnāna here refers to the subtle principle that organizes and gives life to bodily form.

But this "knowing," at present, only serves as a preparatory phase. This same "firm, purified,

tense, sincere, unblemished, malleable, ductile, compact, incorruptible" mind is directed toward a further "knowing," toward the vision of "previous forms of existence."

There arises the memory-vision of "many previous forms of existence, of one life, of two lives, of three lives" and so back through whole series of lives in the periods both of the coming-to-be and of the dissolution of worlds. "There was I, I had such a name, I belonged to such a people, such was my state, such my office; this good and this evil I experienced, thus was the end of my life. Having passed on from there, I entered again into existence." in such a manner, the ascetic recalls multiple forms of existence, each with its own characteristics, each with its own special relationships. A simile is given: as if a man were to go from one village to another and from there to another and finally were to return home and, in recollecting, should think thus: "I, then, went from one village to another, where I stood thus, I sat thus, I spoke thus, T kept silent thus; from that village I went to another, where I did thus and thus, and finally I returned to my village ('the country of the ancestors')." This is the first "knowing"—the precise term is *pubbe nivāsanāna*—a revealing vision having as counterpart an interior liberation, a definite self elevation beyond the *samsāric* group to which a given particular individual existence belongs, and which now appears as a mere episode.

The next experience concerns a "celestial, clarified, superhuman eye," it is called *dibba-cakkhunāna*, which develops the vision, no longer of one's "own" existences, but of other *samsāric* groups, of the appearance and disappearance of beings in the sequence that is determined by the law of action, of *kamma*. "With this celestial, clarified, superhuman eye the ascetic sees beings disappear and appear, beings that are common and noble, ugly and beautiful, happy and unhappy, and he apprehends that beings always appear in life according to their actions." Here, too, we have a simile: as if there were two buildings with doors, and a man with good sight, standing between them, were to see people leaving one house and entering the other, going and coming.

This power of vision, by means of which the contingency of the various forms of existence is directly contemplated from a universal, "celestial" standpoint, provides the final catharsis, leads to *pannā* or *bodhi*, to liberation, illumination, and extinction, to the same culmination that crowned and resolved the series of the five *āyatana*, of the five reintegrations in the sphere beyond form. We have, then, as the third and last "knowing," the vision of the "conditioned genesis" that determines the "round of rebirth" of beings, the vision of that which lies at the root of the genesis, of that which is its end and of the states that lead to this end. At this point the *āsava* disappear; there occurs the "redemption of the mind without manias," and again we have the formula: "Exhausted is life, the divine path achieved, that which had to be done has been done, this world no longer exists." There is a final simile, dealing with the crystallinity, the absolute transparency and clarity of this vision that brings to an end the entire catharsis: as if a man with good sight were to stand on the banks of an alpine valley lake and, completely aware, were to consider the shells and the snails, the gravel and the sand and the schools of fish, how they dart about or lie still.¹⁹

Apart from the initial "projection" of oneself, this second path has thus three stages. It is

important to emphasize that in some canonical texts they are related, respectively, to the three watches (yama) of the night. Thus, the Buddha says: "This knowing [that is, the first, the vision of one's own multiple, previous states of existence] I first apprehended in the first watch of the night, I dispersed ignorance, I apprehended wisdom. I dispersed obscurity. I apprehended light, whilst I dwelt striving ardently, watchful and strenuous." The same formula is repeated for the other two "knowings." The disappearance and reappearance of beings is the second "knowing" to be apprehended, in the middle watch of the night, and the final, liberating vision is the third to be achieved, in the last watch of the night.²⁰

In one text, it is said: "When the dawn is about to break, at the moment in which sleep is so profound and to wake so difficult." Another point: the three "knowings" have also been related to so many immaterial births (opapātika).

There is the simile of the hen that has completely incubated her eggs and is waiting for them to hatch and for the new being to arise from them, safe and sound. The warmth that nourishes this symbolical birth is that of ascesis, tapas. At the moment in which the "knowing" of the various previous tales of existence is apprehended, the ascetic—it is said—"is for the first time disclosed, like the chick come out of the shell." This first birth—beyond physical, samsāric birth—is the growth beyond one's own individuality; a growth that is bound up with the ability to gaze beyond the temporal limits of an individual existence, to see the whole group to which it belongs. A second opening is achieved with the "knowing" of the passing and uprising of beings and, finally, a third when the sudden flash of knowledge destroys the āsavā and determines the state of nibbāna.

21 Each of the three "transcendental knowings" is, then, an awakening, an "opening," a change of state, the passage from one mode of being to another, from one "world" to another. Thus we find in Buddhism a traditional symbolism that is used in many forms of initiation, probably in connection with similar experiences. Besides these three births which are of a real nature, there is a birth that is symbolical and, above all, moral, the "rebirth with the birth of the Ariya" or the "blessed birth," referred to the man who makes the break, who achieves "departure," and who devotes himself to the path of awakening.²²

We must give an explanation of this new group of transcendental experiences also. It is essential here to distinguish between the deepest content of the doctrine and that which refers to the popular exposition and that cannot be taken in an absolute sense (paramatthavasena).

To begin with, at this point we must forestall the idea that not only is the theory of reincarnation assumed by the Buddhist teaching, but that it is, in fact, demonstrated by a direct form of transcendental knowledge in the shape of an actual memory. It might seem, that is to say, that the situation were thus: that one single being having lived several lives or, at least, several forms of existence, could, at a particular moment, see retrospectively.

Such an interpretation, in spite of all appearances, would be mistaken.

Spiritual Virility

In order to understand the true sense of these experiences, we must always remember their point of departure, that is, nāpa-dassana, the vision or "projection" of one's own person that allows of its consideration as a thing or as the person of another. In this there occurs, in a manner of speaking, the fulfillment of all the likelihood of severance from one's own "I," from one's own individuality, which has been carried out in the preceding ascesis.

This means that one has become integrated in a new dimension or at a new level, an integration that is inevitably accompanied by a "loosening." Consciousness is no longer tied to a particular "name-and-form," it can move, it can take on the person of other people, both in space and in time. This is the foundation of the first two "transcendental knowings," the vision of many preceding forms of existence (superindividuality in time) and the vision of the disappearance and reappearance of other beings (superindividuality in space, that is to say, with regard to various individual lives co-present in space).

With reference to the first experience, we could speak, in a certain sense, of "memory," but not as though it were one particular "I" that remembered having lived other lives or, more generally having passed through other forms of existence. We can see that this would be absurd for the simple reason that the condition for achieving such a "memory" is no longer to be an "I" to be free from "I" or from the consciousness connected with a particular "name-and-form" and with a particular life. We are no longer dealing with the memory of an "I" but with the emergence, in the individual consciousness, of samsāric consciousness, with the "memory" associated with the groups of craving, or daemon, or antarabhāva with which one was identified: for—as we saw one does not adopt a "name-and-form," a physiopsychical organism drawn from nowhere, but a more or less preformed samsāric force carrying with it a heredity, a complex of tendencies, which continue from the dead lives in which this force was previously active. The continuity and therefore also the basis of "memory" is contained in this force: it is not contained in an identical and permanent "I" to which Buddhism rightly denies an existence on the samsāric plane. At the moment when consciousness becomes disindividualized, breaks the bond of the samsāric "I" and becomes universal, this same samsāric memory is spread out clearly before it. The very moment of one's dissociation from the "daemon," or "double," is the moment in which one comes to know it. This is the deeper meaning of the first "knowing," of the "memory of preceding forms of existence."

In the second "knowing" there is an increase in the power of the disindividualized consciousness, a consciousness that now extends not only along time and along the group of that particular entity of craving with which it was identified, but also in space, since it becomes capable of identifying itself also with other beings and of examining the samsāric heredity that determines them, the will of craving in which they live and where are determined the causes, when the material of one life is consumed, for the same flame to flare up elsewhere in strict accordance with its antecedents.

Thus it is that, in these experiences, we can see the counterpart of liberations that are exactly similar to those of the ascetic who advances through the live planes free from form. In fact, it is

not by chance that we have spoken not of "multiple lives," but rather of "multiple states of existence." The assumption of the person of other people, which we have mentioned, is by no means restricted to human lives in space and time, but includes also extraterrestrial lines of existence and of heredity. Now, all this is possible only if one reaches a dimension to be compared to the depths of the ocean, where all the insular and continental parts emerging from the water as separate things are unified in a single mass. We are thus brought back to images of immensity, vastness, immeasurableness, indiscernibility. About such images we shall have more to say later.

And it is natural that the texts refuse to apply to the Accomplished One, who has followed this path to the end, any category whatsoever that, in common speech, takes its meaning from the existence or nonexistence, from the life or death of an individual being.

Thus the theory of reincarnation is rejected from two points of view: firstly from the point of view of ordinary, samsāric beings, since it is not the same being that has already lived nor that will live again, but rather the groups of craving working in him. On this plane a real substantial "I" does not exist. Secondly, from the point of view of transcendental illumination, since from this point of view the "many existences" can only represent a mirage. The one who contemplates them can no longer be considered as an "I," and he is now also about to break the law that from one samsāric group there must spring a new existence. As we shall see, the Buddhist teaching also considers intermediate cases, that is to say, cases of incomplete extinction: but for further states of existence or for new "lives," in the degree in which extinction is not complete, what we have said about the ordinary man is to a large extent still valid: there is no proper continuity, there are only transformations that affect also the "sub-stratum." Buddhism maintains this view in connection with the "mental body" and with the body "free from form" which various texts attribute to the Accomplished One, the term "body" here being used in a general sense, implying other states and modes of being relative to the "worlds," beyond the physical one, that are reached by the jhāna. The question was asked if such "bodies" exist simultaneously. The answer is negative. But the doctrine goes still further: the passage from one to another of these states does not present a true continuity. The transformations are absolute, as in the aforesaid simile of the milk that becomes curd and curd that becomes cheese. It is absurd still to call curd milk or cheese curd: in changing the state, it is well also to change the name.²³ With still more reason, the idea of an absolute identity of the "I" in the states to which a partial liberation may lead is to be rejected.

On the subject of "reincarnations" and of "many lives." we must remember that, in spite of the opinions held in some circles, such ideas find no place in serious traditional teachings, Eastern or Western, nor therefore in Buddhism. Those passages in Buddhism and in the Indo-Aryan traditions in general that would seem to indicate the contrary, do so either because of a too literal reading of the texts or because they are popular forms of exposition that only have a symbolical value, rather like the crude images of the Christian purgatory or hell that are common among simple folk. To accept unquestioningly all that can be found in the Buddhist texts on the subject

of preceding existences not only opens the way to all sorts of contradictions and incoherences on the doctrinal level, but also breeds doubts as to the efficacy of the historical Buddha's real supernormal vision.

The stories in the canon, and particularly in the Jātaka, of the presumed previous existences of Prince Siddhattha, notably in the form of animals, are all evidently of a fabulous nature and, even when their origin is not wholly spurious, it is easy to see that they have been invented or introduced into Buddhism from already existing popular traditions for pedagogic use to illustrate and en-liven discourses.

We do not find, in the texts, a single serious reference to anything like a "memory." like an actual fact of the past seen by supernormal means and then communicated. Here, also, the Awakened One maintains his silence. In any case, the classical and dryly glittering spirit of original Buddhism, so free of sentimentalism, is rarely found in the later texts, beginning with the Jataka, where not only is there a tropical overgrowth of phantasmagorical and fabulous elements, but also not a few distortions of the original doctrine of the Ariya, particularly on the moral plane. It will be enough to remember—one case will serve for a whole series of others—the story dealing with the preceding life of Prince Siddhattha wherein he is supposed to have been an animal that, upon seeing a hungry tiger, allowed itself to be torn to pieces through "compassion," thus acquiring the "merit" that, through the series of other lives, was little by little to lead him to the grade of Awakened One. Whenever higher wisdom is not enclosed in the form of rigorous esotericism—true esotericism, not that of contemporary "occultists"—such alterations are almost inevitable and it is for intelligent people to discriminate accurately, to pick out the essentials, or to clarify what has become obscure: which can be done only by the guidance of sound principles of a traditional and metaphysical kind.

We must mention another point. We have seen that the three supernormal "knowings" have been related by the texts to the first, second, and third watches of the night, respectively. This is an important fact once we remember the Indo-Aryan teachings on the "four states": the state of individual wakeful consciousness, the state of dreaming, the state of sleep, and finally, the so-called fourth state (caturtha or turiya). In the same "space" in which, when individual wakeful consciousness disappears, the ordinary man starts to dream, passes into the unconsciousness of dreamless sleep, and finally into a state like apparent death, it is possible to achieve, instead, a series of "liberations," of degrees of superconsciousness.

In this connection, the state of dreaming (that is to say, what would correspond to dreaming in the ordinary man) is called by the texts tejo. from tejas, which means "radiant light" and which is related to what we have said about ākāsa, "ether"; the state of deep, dream-less sleep "where there is no knowledge, but the subject of knowledge continues to know," is related to the condition of prajnā (Pāli: pannā) or of "illumination": here "the being reunites with himself in a unity of pure knowledge and beatitude"; here there is "the perfect serenity which, rising up from the body and arriving at the supreme light, appears in its true aspect"; here we are on the point of crossing that dyke, "beyond which he who was blind is no longer blind, he who was wounded is

no longer wounded, he who was ill is no longer ill," where "even night becomes day." The fourth condition corresponds to the unconditioned state, absolutely above all duality, all particular forms of manifestation, beyond both interior consciousness and exterior consciousness, and above both together.²⁴

When we spoke of the *jhāna*, we considered the possibility of references to transformations of this sort, and a more exact correspondence can be seen with regard to the developments in the world free from form, to the *āyatana*. Thus, we are not unjustified in matching the Indo-Aryan traditional doctrine we have just discussed with the realizations that take place in the three watches of the night: we have a consciousness that, "like a fire that advances destroying every bond," carries one beyond the state of wakefulness, leaves this state behind, advances to the state that in others would be sleep or profound sleep, and establishes itself there, "dissipating ignorance, achieving wisdom, dissipating the shadows, achieving the light"—just as says the Buddhist formula that refers to the "supernormal knowing" acquired during the first, second, and third watches of the night. Beyond the "luminous" or "radiant" state of *taijasa*, beyond the state of pure illumination (*prajnā*, in Buddhism, would correspond to the opening of the "celestial, unclouded. superterrestrial eye") there is the unconditioned state. *Turīya*, the unconditioned state of the *ātmā* in the general Indo-Aryan tradition, would then correspond to the state of *nirvāna* in the Buddhist terminology.²⁵

In such terms, the "vigil" of the Ariya appears in the grandeur of a change in which the night is transformed into day, unconsciousness into superconsciousness; the vision of an indefinite number of existences dispersed in time spreads out like a memory, and is left behind. During the last hours of the night, where for the others "sleep is deepest," at the dawning of the physical light, there dawns also that where it is said that in the second watch of the night he sleeps and simultaneously enters into contact with some divinities. In the third watch, arising, with his superterrestrial eye he perceives those who have decided to tread the path of awakening.

wisdom, that awakening, in which every mania is destroyed and which towers over all worlds with their ranks of angels, evil and good spirits, gods and men, ascetics and priests. Thus the Accomplished One, when the final watch of the night changes into light, returns to the world of men at the moment in which the day once again shines on him, and awakening corresponds to awakening, the physical and the meta-physical elements meet, and truly may we use for him a similitude of the texts: that of the sun. "when, in the last month of the rainy season, after it has dissipated and put to flight the rain-swollen clouds, it rises in the sky and disperses with its rays the mist in the air, and flashes and shines." This is the mighty appearance of the Awakened One among men. "Light of the world," the Buddha has been called—"the light of wisdom becomes light of the world" ;²⁶ the sage, who appears in the world of men and of gods, proceeding alone, in the midst of the people], dispersing every shadow."²⁷

The Ariya Are Still Gathered on the Vulture's Peak

In this book we have not set out to make Buddhist propaganda but, rather, as we said, to indicate the fundamental elements of a complete system of asceticism: these elements may be found in other traditions also, but they appear with particular clarity in the Buddhist teaching, which lends itself admirably to our purpose for the various reasons that we discussed at the beginning.

It now remains to suggest the significance that an asceticism of this sort may have at the present day.

We need hardly stress the fact that the modern world stands, more completely so perhaps than in any other civilization, at the opposite pole to that of an ascetic view of life. We are not talking here of the religious problem that, as we have seen, has no direct relationship to higher asceticism. We are speaking of fundamental orientations of the spirit.

It would be hard to deny that "activism," the exaltation and practice of action understood as force, impetus, becoming, struggle, transformation, perennial research, or ceaseless movement, is the watchword of the modern world. The world of the "being" is drawing to its close, and this decline has for long been hailed with joy. Not only do we have today the triumph of activism, but also a philosophy *sui generis* at its service; a philosophy whose systematic criticism and whose speculative apparatus serve to justify it in every way while pouring contempt and heaping discredit on all other points of view.

Interest in pure knowledge has become ever more displaced by interest in "living" and in "doing" or, at any rate, by interest in those departments of knowledge that can be employed in terms of action or practical and temporal realization. Today the nature and potentialities of pure knowledge, that is to say, knowledge whose peculiar object—as in the traditional ideal of all periods—is superindividual and superhistorical reality is almost unknown. Our contemporaries grow ever more accustomed to disregard the "being" aspect of things and concentrate, instead, upon their aspect as "becoming," "life," "movement," "development," or "history."

"Historicism" and "the cult of becoming" beat out the rhythm of activism, even on the cultural plane. Pragmatism, voluntarism, irrationalism, varieties of the religion of "life" and "actuality," relativism, evolutionism, progressivism, Faustism, are lines of speculation that, in spite of their different guises, all spring from the same motive. And this, then, is merely the translation into terms of self-consciousness and intellectual justification of the central motive of the precipitate life of these times, with its tumult, its agitation, its fever for speed, its mechanization devoted to the shortening of all intervals of space and time, its congestive and breathless rhythm that is, particularly in the New World, carried to its limit. There the activist theme really reaches paroxysmal and almost pandemic heights and completely absorbs the whole of life, whose horizons, moreover, are thereby restricted to the dark and gloom that are natural to wholly temporal and contingent achievements.

It is too an ominous fact that forces of a collectivist and therefore subpersonal nature must gain more and more power over beings who have no real traditional support and are racked by a

fundamental restlessness. The activist world is also essentially a featureless and plebeian world, ruled by the demon of collectivism: it is not only the scene of triumph of what has been called "the ideal animal," but it is also a world that is essentially "telluric," moved by forces that are hound up with the elements of "mass" and "quantity," where action, force, strife, and even heroism and sacrifice are seen to become increasingly irrational, devoid of light, "elemental," and altogether earthly.

That which the ancient Indo-Aryan wisdom had denoted by the symbol of samsāric existence, and which corresponding Western traditions had styled "the Age of Iron," can now be said to be at the height of its career; and there is no lack, either in Buddhism or in similar traditions, of texts in which such characteristics of times to come were predicted with astonishing accuracy.¹ We repeat, however, that the main characteristic of our times is not that life tends to exhaust itself almost exclusively on the samsāric plane, but that our civilization stimulates and exalts this kind of life, and considers it, not so much as a state of fact, but rather as something of value, as something that should be, as something that is right. It must be unique in all history that samsāra should become the object of a species of mystique or religion. The new philosophies of life, of becoming, of the elan vital, which flourish on the borders of practical activism, have just this significance and even come to exalt in human existence all that is unconscious spontaneity, pure vitality, prepersonal biological sub-stratum and which is therefore, essentially prehuman and subhuman.

To think that we can effectively react against such a state of affairs, taken as a whole, would be frivolous, and would mean (unless we are simply dealing with intellectual reactions) ignoring the remote causes that have gradually led up to it they are causes that cannot be removed in a day. But although success on a large scale, taking into account the general orientation of the modern world, is at present very remote, yet it might be achieved locally within the circle of an elite, of a certain number of qualified individuals.

The only possible point of reference, here, is ascetic values, in the fullest, purest, and strictest meaning of the term. The affirmation of an ascetic vision of life is today particularly necessary in view of the unparalleled force of the "telluric" and samsāric element in the modern world.

The prejudices that have been created or encouraged by certain quite special, abnormal, and un-Aryan forms of asceticism we have already removed. Let no one, then, declare that asceticism means renunciation, flight from the world, inaction, quiet-ism, or mortification. The affirmation of a background of pure transcendence to balance a world that is ever more and more the captive of immanency, is the first point and the first task.

But another point, not less important, concerns that very action that lies so close to the heart of our contemporaries. Indeed, one could justly maintain that those who despise all asceticism know nothing of what action really is, and what they exalt is merely an inferior, emasculated, and passive form of action. The sort of activism that consists in fever, impulsiveness, identification, centerless vertigo, passion, or agitation, far from testifying power, merely demonstrates

impotence. Our own classical world knew this well: the central theme of the Ciceronian oration *Pro Mar-cello* is just this: there is no higher power than that of mastery over oneself.

Only those who possess this mastery can know what is the true action, which shows them also to the outside world, not as those who are acted upon, but as those who truly act. We remember the illuminating Buddhist saying: he who goes, stands still—he who stands still, goes. For this very reason, in the traditions springing from the same root all movement, activity, becoming, or change was referred to the passive and female principle, while to the positive, luminous, masculine principle were attributed the particular qualities of immobility, unchangeability, and stability.

We can, then, definitely affirm the existence of an ascesis that in no way signifies quietism but that is, rather, the prerequisite for a higher, aristocratic ideal of activity and virility.

This ideal—let it be noted—is in no way a monopoly of the East. The basic idea with which we are dealing is traditionally Aryan, whence we can also find it among ourselves.

The same idea was expressed on the metaphysical plane by Plotinus when he spoke of the becoming that is only "the flight of beings that are and that are not," or by Aristotle when he discussed the "still Mover." or, on the ethical plane, by the Roman Stoa with its emphasis on the sidereal and unchangeable element of the mind as the basis of all human effort and dignity.

One who is the cause and effective master of motion does not himself move. He inspires motion and directs action, but he himself does not act, in the sense that he is not transported, he is not involved in action, he is not action, but is, on the other hand, an impassive, utterly calm and imperative superiority, from whom action proceeds and on whom it depends. As opposed to this idea of true and mastered action, which is only thinkable, however, on the basis of purification from the samsāric element, one who acts while identifying himself with his action, impulsively, urged by passion.

By desire, by the irrational, by restless need or vulgar interest, such a one does not really act, but is acted upon. However paradoxical it may sound, his is a passive action—he stands under the sign, not of virility, but of femininity. And under the sign of femininity, the whole modern "telluric" and activist world also stands.¹ It is only a lower, anti-aristocratic form of action that predominates here. Otherwise, it actually betrays that half-conscious desire to deafen and distract, that agitation and clamour that reveal dread of the silence, the internal isolation, the absolute being of higher nature, or it becomes a weapon employed in the revolution of man against the eternal that indeed marks the limit of the samsāric "ignorance" and intoxication of fallen beings.

All this is generally true of asceticism as a whole. More particularly, it is even possible to demonstrate historically that the ancient Oriental Aryan forms of ascesis are also capable of this application. We should not forget that, if the East, whether Indo-European or Asian, has not until now given to a modern man the impression, from certain aspects, of a civilization that is

activistically practical, this is due not to a lack of strength, but to the fact of having absorbed its principal energies in the vertical direction that is beyond becoming and history; few of the well-born in these civilizations had, or have even now, much interest in other forms of achievement. But where these achievements, through external circumstance or through the development of special vocations, have acquired a certain power of attraction over the spirit, the East has shown, on the same plane of action, what energy and will can do when they are shaped essentially by the ascetic view of life. Anyone who objects and points out, for example, the more recent political state of India, forgets that this country, quite apart from its original epics, had its own imperial cycle under Candragupta and under Asoka, a sovereign who was profoundly Buddhist. Besides, we know of no Western text in which heroism and warlike action have received a transcendental justification so precise and a transfiguration so high, as in the *Bhagavadgītā*; while on another level it is well known that of all the troops England gathered in her empire, those provided by India were the best qualified, composed as they were, not of "soldiers," but of warriors by race and vocation. And it was from warrior stock—as we have seen—that Prince Siddhattha himself came.

But a better example is offered us by Japan. It has been justly stated⁵ that "the Russo-Japanese War, to the great surprise of most of the European world, showed us how the supposed 'emasculated Oriental immobility' could purposively and heroically fight, on land and sea, the so-called virile Western mobility. The heroism of the Japanese, educated for a millennium and a half by Buddhist doctrine, has shown unmistakably that Buddhism is not the opiate that everyone previously imagined." Anyone with the interests of the West at heart should indeed hope that the future will not create a change of mind in the Oriental peoples whereby they are led to apply against the West their enormous spiritual potential; that the power that has been created by a millennial ascetic vision of life, should be directed onto the temporal plane on which most of Europe, having cut itself off from its best traditions, has chosen to concentrate.

It was not entirely unintentional that, at the end of this book, we spoke of Zen Buddhism. This particularly esoteric form of the Buddhist doctrine has been the most congenial to the Japanese warrior nobility, and Zen has even been called "the religion of the Samurai." According to the Japanese point of view, if a man is a man, and not an animal, he can only be a Samurai: courageous, upright, trustworthy, virile, faithful and full of controlled dignity and ready for any active sacrifice. But the precepts of virility, loyalty, courage, control of the mind, instincts, action, and disdain for a soft life and empty luxury—all these are elements of Bushido, the ethics of the Samurai warrior nobility, found in the Zen asceticism, which derived from the Buddhist Doctrine of Awakening their confirmation, integration, and likewise their transcendent basis. "It was thus that the Japanese nobleman was capable of a quite special and unconditioned form of heroism: not "tragic" but "Olympian," the heroism of one who can give away his complete life without regrets, with a clear vision of the goal in view and with an entire disregard for his own person, because he is not life and is not person, but already partakes of the superindividual and supertemporal.

These are only examples; and we do not wish to give the idea that we are making a defence of the East or of the Far East. Let us repeat: we are dealing here with general views of life, a distinction between East and West does not enter the discussion since the opposition is one of supernational and supercontinental nature. Our own Middle Ages also knew a sacred heroism, and its history likewise shows, in majestic strokes, how a heroic cycle—whenever the corresponding vocation is present—can develop under the influence of an ascetic view of life, even when this view presents deviations, shortcomings, and limitations of considerable importance as happens in the case of Christianity. Either as detachment beyond action, or as detachment in action and for action, there exists a common tradition. We have purposely made considerable use of the term "Olympian" in order to remind those who might forget. From the ancient Mediterranean "Olympian" world, where the opposition between region of being and region of becoming, between the cycle of generation and the superworld corresponds exactly to the Indo-Aryan opposition between *samsāra* and *nirvāna*, we derive our highest heritage, that which the modern world has forgotten but which still persisted in some measure among the Germanic and Roman elements of the best of the Middle Ages. The Olympian view of life, to which every true ascetic value is intimately bound, is the highest, most original, and most Aryan of the West. It holds the symbol of all that, in a higher sense, can be called classical and aristocratic.

A return to ascetic values can, then, be conceived in two forms and in two degrees. A formation of life newly oriented toward the extrasamsāric and "sidereal" element can, in the first place, teach what real action and mastery are to all those who know only their most obscure and irrational forms. In the second place, ascesis as affirmation of pure transcendency, as detachment, not only in action, but beyond action, toward awakening, can ensure that the immobile is not overturned by the changeable, that forces of centrality, forces of the world of being are set up against forces of becoming. Nor should we think of this second process as though we had to do with the presence of guests of stone at a banquet of the agitated and fanatical. To inspire and establish, even in scattered and unknown beings, extrasamsāric forces, may be an action whose invisible effects, even on the plane of visible and historical reality, are considerably more important than many might imagine. It is Buddhist teaching that the Ariya are able to work from a distance, for the good of many, in the human sphere as well as in the "divine," and these spheres would be harmed by differences among the Ariya. It is Buddhist doctrine that when the Ariya, in their disindividualized consciousness, suffuse the world with the irradiant contemplations, they can liberate forces that go out into it and act invisibly upon distant lands and destinies. We think it possible that should the course of history, in spite of appearances, not deteriorate further, this may perhaps be due, less to the efforts and direct action of groups of men and leaders of men, than to the influences proceeding, through the paths of the spirit, from the secret realizations of a few nameless and remote ascetics, in Tibet or on Mount Athos, among the Zen, or in some Trappist or Carthusian cloister of Europe.

To an awakened eye, to an eye capable of seeing with the sight of one on the Further Shore, these same realizations would appear as the only steady lights in the darkness, as the only peaks

emerging, calm and sovereign, above the seas of mist down in the valleys.⁹ Every true ascetic realization becomes inevitably transformed into a support—an invisible one, but for all that nonetheless real and efficacious—for those who, on the visible plane, resist and struggle against the forces of an obscure age.

Lastly, let us say a few words about that special class of reader who is interested in "spiritualism." We have already, in our *Maschera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo*, warned such readers against the errors and confusions that have been set afoot by many modern trends through mistaken aspirations toward the supernatural and supersensible. Should anyone seriously harbour such aspirations, he must take careful stock of such errors and confusions and, above all, not deceive himself that true realization of what lies beyond the human condition is possible without rigorous "ascetic" preparation and consolidation. Given the conditions in which the Westerner now finds himself and which we have frequently mentioned, such preparation is, today more than ever indispensable. We should then he under no illusions about the real nature of knowledge or "occult" discipline, particularly when we are dealing with what our contemporaries put forward. A doctrine, such as the one we have discussed, gives a very good idea of the possibility of an Aryan and aristocratic path beyond samsāric existence. This path will have no need of "religious" aids, dogmas, or petty moralities, and it genuinely corresponds to the will for the unconditioned. But, at the same time, this doctrine shows no less clearly the preliminary conditions for ascesis and detachment that are absolutely imperative for any enterprise of a transcendent nature. It also shows that the path of awakening—identical in its spirit with every true "initiation"—is absolutely irreconcilable with all that is implied by confused mysticism, mediumistic cults, the subconscious, visionarism, manias for occult phenomena and powers, and neopsychnoanalytical contaminations. It is well known that interested circles—either confessionalists or "illumined" in the profane and "critical" sense—rely on such spiritual deviations in their attempt to heap discredit upon the ideals and kinds of wisdom that, in one form or another, were always recognized as the culminating point of every normal and traditional civilization. To realize that, as we have indicated, there is similar content in the path announced by a figure of the dignity and grandeur of Prince Siddhattha.

9. We may here call to mind the words of the Atharva Veda (12.1.1): "The great truth, the powerful order (rta), the initiation, the ascesis, the rite and the sacrifice sustain the earth." the Buddha—and that this path, even if only in distant and varied reflections. is now related to the faith of more than four hundred million followers—such a realization should be enough to forestall any attempt by such shortsighted or malicious individuals to cause error and confusion of thought.

In the opposite field, we must say something in particular about two currents: the one, followed by those who, though themselves Orientals, apply themselves to "adapting" ideas of the ancient traditions in their own way and to popularizing them in the West; and the other, which aims at introducing the concept of a new "modern initiation." The first case brings to mind the Hindu parable of a man who, when surrounded by water in a drenching rainstorm, made a great effort to

draw some up from a muddy well.

As far as the Oriental traditions go, or rather, the various Oriental forms of the one tradition, the situation we have to deal with is different from that existing in the West.

Even in the case of transcendent wisdom there exist ancient texts, for the most part translated and available to all, where we can find, in a purer and more complete form, all that such people would vulgarize and reduce, at best, to an emasculated reflection of the original. Anyone who can lay his hands on the Buddhist texts or the Bhagavadgītā or the yoga and Vedānta texts should be able calmly to close the doors on these modern publishers and commentators and adaptors, leaving himself only the serious task of study and achievement. But, the true reason for the success of such new expositions is to be found where they are the most accommodating, least rigid, least severe, most vague, and ready to come to easy terms with the prejudices and weaknesses of the modern world. Let everyone have the courage to look deeply into himself and to see what it is that he really wants.

The second current differs from the first in that it makes no attempt to adapt or spread a kind of wisdom that is either ancient or Oriental. On the contrary it maintains that such forms of knowledge are unsuitable for the man of today who requires an altogether modern kind of "initiation." This is based upon evolutionism applied to affairs of the spirit. An evolutionary development of the world and of humanity is assumed, and it is thought that even the spirit should conform to this law and follow this development.

There is no trace of such an idea in the teachings of any school of wisdom. The world is what it is, samsāra, said the Indo-Aryans; κύκλος της γενέσεως, an eternal cycle of generation, said the ancient Greeks. And in samsāra there is no "evolution," there is no beginning and there is no end. By "going" one does not reach the "end of the world." The direction in which we may find awakening and liberation, the direction of initiation, is vertical and has nothing to do with the course of history.

Certainly, the condition of modern man is very different from that of ancient man—and in the course of this study we have repeatedly emphasized this fact. A "fall" or a "descent" has taken place, which is in no way a happening in an evolutional scheme, designed to produce, in a "happy ending," something higher than ever existed before. If this fall has any significance, it is that it shows the terrible power of the liberty of the spirit that can design and bring about even its own negation. There-fore the only thing to do is to admit that the ancient teachings cannot be used today without due consideration, and modern man must apply himself to a thankless task of reintegration: he must take himself back spiritually to the state of mind that has, always and everywhere, been the point of departure of a way that is essentially unique. There is no room for a "modern initiation" in a specific sense; by definition all that is modern is the contradiction of anything to do with initiation.

If, when we speak of "modern initiation" we wish to claim for it the characteristics of a "spiritual science," of a discipline that is as clear and exact as regards the supersensible world and the

instruments of inward development as modern science is in regard to its own field and instruments, then we must show where in this respect it does more than simply state the problem.

It is, rather to traditional doctrines such as the one that we have laid before him in the present book, that the reader who is attracted by true spirituality should turn, to understand what a "spiritual science" really is: these doctrines will teach him the clarity of pure knowledge, divorced from all forms of visionary "clairvoyance," joined to a spiritual sovereignty, and to the will to break not only the human bond, but the bond formed by any other "world." Modern man has not only to fight against materialism, but must also defend himself from the snares and allurements of false supernaturalism. His defence will be firm and effective only if he is capable of returning to the origins, of assimilating the ancient traditions, and then of relying upon the asceticism to carry out the task of reestablishing his inner condition. For it is through this that these traditions will reveal to him their deepest and perennially real content and show him, step by step, the path. In conclusion, we would like to repeat the ancient Roman augural formula: *quod bonum faustumque sit*. We would, that is to say, count it as most fortunate if this further modest contribution of ours to the understanding of premodern spirituality were to serve someone as something more than a simple reading. Only then could we repeat the formula of the Ariya: *katam karaniyam*— "done is what was to be done."

On the "Hero" and the "Woman"

As everybody knows, the doctrine of the Golden Age is part of the doctrine of the four ages, which testifies to the progressive spiritual involution unfolding in the course of history since very ancient times. All of these ages also have a morphological meaning and express a typical and universal form of civilization. Following the Golden Age, we encounter the Silver Age, which corresponds to a priestly and feminine rather than regal and virile type of spirituality: I have called it lunar spirituality, since the symbols of gold and silver have traditionally been in the same relationship as that between sun and moon.

In this context, such correspondence is particularly revealing: the moon is the feminine star that, unlike the sun, no longer has in itself the principle of its own light. Hence the shift to a spirituality conditioned by mediation, namely, an extrovert spirituality characterized by an attitude of submission, of abandonment, of loving or ecstatic rapture. Here we find the root of the "religious" phenomenon, from its theistic-devotional forms to its mystical ones.

Any resurgence of a wild and materialized virility against such spiritual forms characterizes the Bronze Age. This age is characterized by the degradation of the warriors' caste and by its revolt against him who represents the spirit, insofar as he is no longer the Olympian leader but only a priest. The Bronze Age is also marked by the unleashing of the principle proper to the warriors' caste, namely, pride, violence, war. The corresponding myth is the Titanic or Luciferian revolt, or the Promethean attempt to steal the Olympian fire. The age of "giants," or of the Wolf, or of the "elemental beings;" is an equivalent figuration found in various traditions and in their fragments

preserved in legends and epics of various peoples.

The last age is the Iron Age, or, according to the corresponding Hindu term, the Dark Age (Kali Yuga). This age includes every deconsecrated civilization, every civilization that knows and extols only what is human and earthly.

Against these forms of decadence there emerged the idea of a possible cycle of restoration, which Hesiod called the heroic cycle or age of heroes. Here we must employ the term heroic in a special, technical sense distinct from the usual meaning. According to Hesiod, the "generation of heroes" was created by Zeus, that is to say, by the Olympian principle, with the possibility of reattaining the primordial state and thus to give life to a new "golden" cycle.¹ But in order to realize this, which is only a possibility and no longer a state of affairs, it is first necessary to overcome both the "lunar" spirituality and the materialized virility, namely, both the priest and the mere warrior or the Titan.

These archetypes are found in the "heroic" figures of almost every tradition. In the Hellenic-Achaean tradition, for instance, Heracles is described as a heroic prototype precisely in these terms; his perennial nemesis is Hera, the supreme goddess of the lunar-pantheistic cult. Heracles earns Olympian immortality after allying himself to Zeus, who is the Olympian principle, against the "giants"; according to one of the myths of this cycle, it is through Heracles that the "titanic" element (symbolized by Prometheus) is freed and reconciled with the Olympian element.

While, on the one hand, the Titan represents one who does not accept the human condition and who wants to steal the divine fire, on the other hand, only a small difference separates the hero from the Titan. Thus Pindar exhorted people not to "yearn to become like gods"; also, in the Hebrew mythology, the symbol of Adam's curse acted as an analogous warning and indicated a fundamental danger.

The titanic type-or, in another respect, the warrior type-is, after all, the prime matter of which heroes are made. But in order to implement a positive solution to the dilemma, that is, to attain an Olympian transformation as the reintegration of the primordial state, it is necessary to fulfill a double condition.

First of all, it is necessary to show the proof and the confirmation of the virile qualification; thus in the epic and knightly symbolism we find a series of adventures, feats, and fights. This qualification should not become a limitation, a hubris, a closure of the "I;" and it should not paralyze the capability of opening oneself up to a transcendent force, in function of which alone can the fire really become light and free itself. Second, such liberation should not signify a cessation of the inner tension; thus a further test consists in adequately reaffirming the virile quality on the supersensible plane. The consequence of this is the Olympian transformation or the achievement of that dignity which in initiatory traditions has always been designated as "regal." This is the decisive point that differentiates the heroic experience from every mystical evasion and from every pantheistic confusion; among the various symbols that may refer to this point is the symbolism of the woman.

In the Indo-Aryan tradition, every god—that is, every transcendent power—is joined with a bride, and the term *sakti*, "bride," also means "power." In the West, Wisdom (*Sophia*) and sometimes even the Holy Spirit were represented as a royal woman, while in Greek mythology, Hebe, the perennial Olympian youth, was given in marriage to Heracles as a wife. In Egyptian figurations, divine women offer to the kings a lotus, which is a symbol of a rebirth and the "key of life." Like the Iranian *fravashi*, the Nordic Valkyrie are a figuration of transcendental parts of warriors, the forces of their destinies and victories. The Roman tradition knew of a *Venus Victrix* who was credited with generating an imperial stock (*Venus Genitrix*); the Celtic tradition mentioned supernatural women who take warriors to mysterious islands to make them immortal with their love. Eve, according to an etymology of the name, means "Life;" or "the Living One." Thus, without proceeding further with similar examples, which I have discussed elsewhere, I wish to emphasize that a very widespread symbolism has seen in the woman a vivifying and transfiguring power, through which it is possible to overcome the human condition.

What is the foundation of the feminine representation of this power? Since every symbolism is based on specific relationships of analogy, it is necessary to begin with the possible relationships between man and woman. These relationships can be either normal or abnormal. They are abnormal when the woman dominates the man. Because the symbolism of the woman connected to this second case does not concern the issue I am discussing here, I will not dwell on it. I will only say that these are instances of gynocentric (matriarchal) views that must be regarded as residues of the cycle of the "lunar" civilization, in which we find a reflection of the theme of man's dependency and passivity toward the spirit conceived under a feminine guise (Cosmic Mother or *magna mater*, Mother of Life, etc.); this is a characteristic theme of that cycle.

However, the more general idea of the woman as the dispenser of the sacrament and as a vivifying principle, or as the bearer of a life that liberates, animates, and transforms mere being,² does not necessarily fall in this category; rather, such an idea may be (and indeed often was) considered a part of a spirituality that I have characterized as "heroic." In this instance, it is necessary to refer to the normal relations between man and woman as the basis of the analogy and of the symbolism; hence the fundamental concept of a situation in which the virile principle retains its own nature. The spirit, *vis-a-vis* the masculine, is the "woman": the virile principle is active, the spirit passive. Even before the power that transfigures it and vivifies the hero, the virile principle retains the character that man has as the lord of his woman. In passing, we must note that this is exactly the opposite of the bridal symbolism prevalent in religious and especially in the Christian mysticism, in which the soul is attributed a feminine role, namely, that of the "bride."

Having said that, and remembering what has been said about the "signs" of the centre, we find mixed symbols: the Woman of the Island; the Woman of the Tree; the Woman of the Fountain; the Woman or Queen of the Castle; the Queen of the Solar Land; the Woman hidden in the Stone; and so forth. More particularly, as the widow the woman expresses a period of silence, that is, a period in which the tradition, the power, or the strength is no longer possessed, has lost her "man;" and awaits a new lord or hero.³ Analogous is the meaning of the imprisoned virgin who

waits to be freed and married to a preordained knight. On this basis, everything that in epic legends and in many chivalric romances is described in terms of adventures and heroic struggles undertaken in the name of a woman is almost always susceptible to interpretation as a symbol of the tests of the virile quality, tests that are assigned as a premise for a transcendent integration of the human personality. And if in this type of literature we also find women who are seductive and who represent a potential danger for the hero, this should not be understood solely in a primitive and direct manner, that is, in terms of a mere carnal seduction.

Rather, this should be understood on a higher plane as a reference to the danger that a heroic adventure can lead to a titanic fall. In this case, the woman represents the seductiveness of transcendent power and knowledge when its possession means Promethean usurpation and the sin of prevaricating pride. Another, opposite aspect may be related with what someone has called "the death which comes from a woman," referring to the loss of the deeper principle of virility.

3. Hence the obvious meaning of the expression "Widow's Son;" which has been preserved even in Western Freemasonry from the Iranian tradition and from Manichaeism.

The Thunderbolt and the Lance

At this point I will focus on the Grail itself.

It has been noted that the Grail, as a stone fallen from Lucifer's crown, resembles in a specific and significative way the frontal stone (urna) that in

Hindu symbolism and especially in Buddhism often represents the place of the "third eye," or "Siva's eye."¹ This is an eye that is endowed with both a transcendent or "cyclical" vision (known in Buddhism as bodhi, or spiritual enlightenment) and a fulgurating power. This latter aspect is in direct relation with what I have previously discussed, considering that it is with this eye that Siva incinerated the god of love Kama, when the latter attempted to awaken in him desire for his consort Sakti. Moreover, in some esoteric traditions of yoga, the frontal eye corresponds to the so-called centre of command (ajjia-cakra), which is the highest seat of "transcendent virility;" namely, that virility in which Siva's symbolic phallus manifests itself in the form of itara, to which it is attributed the power to cross the "stream of becoming" or to go beyond death. ²

After all, according to its generic aspect of stone fallen from the sky, the Luciferian stone recalls the fulgurating power through the symbolism of the so-called stones of thunderbolt, or meteorites, mentioned in many traditions, in which they often represent the thunderbolt itself. Here Rene Guenon has shown the possibility of referring to the symbolism of the ancient stone battle axe that breaks and shatters; this axe too has symbolized the thunderbolt in traditions that almost always are reconnected with the primordial Hyperborean tradition and with its heroic or Olympian representatives (in any event, anti titanic).³

Thus the axe refers not only to Siva, who incinerated the Hindu Eros, but also to Parasu-Rama; it corresponds to Mijolnir, Thor's war hammer, and is the symbolic weapon with which these two

gods strike and defeat telluric, titanic, or wild beings.

Thus the battle-axe is synonymous of that thunderbolt with which the Hellenic Olympian god exterminates the Titans, and especially of the vajra of Indra, the heavenly and warrior god of the primordial Indo-Aryan hosts.

This last reference is particularly interesting, inasmuch as the vajra includes three meanings: scepter, thunderbolt, and adamantine stone. The first meaning recalls the meanings expressed in the symbolism of the lance. A Celtic saga that has a strict relation with that of the Grail, is the saga of Peronnik. Its main motifs are a golden bowl and a diamond lance that must be taken from a castle inhabited by a giant. The bowl has the same beneficial qualities as those of the Grail: "It instantaneously provides all the food and riches one desires; when drinking from it, one is healed from all sickness and the dead come back to life."

The adamantine lance presents the "dreadful" characters of the Luciferian stone, of the vajra, the force-scepter-thunderbolt; it is an inexorable lance, the lance sans merci; bright as a flame, elle tue et brise tout ce qu' elle touche, but as such it is also a pledge of victory. As soon as the hero Peronnik touches these objects, the earth shakes, an awful thunder resounds, the palace disappears, and Peronnik finds himself in the forest with the lance and the bowl, which he brings to the king of Britain.⁴ This phenomenology parallels that of the Grail and the Siege Perilous.

Cyclical view, transcendent virility, power of command, axe-thunderbolt, thunderbolt-scepter-all of these, in the context of myths, are associated with the mysterious stone out of which the Grail came. This stone adorned Lucifer's crown, which he, together with his hosts, attempted to take back, in a sort of angelic revenge. Again, this mysterious stone was in Adam's possession during

3. It is interesting to find the axe or the Hyperborean double battle-axe, carried by some kind of centaur, in several drawings and symbols of ancient Scotland and Ireland. See J. Romilly Allen, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1903), 223, 253, 297. Naturally, with the "migration of symbols," the axe came to be associated with various figures having a loose connection with the Hyperborean tradition, and sometimes real usurpations took place (e.g., in the cycle of the Pelasgic civilization).
4. J. Marx (*Legende arthurienne*, 130-35) mentions the Gai Bolga as an antecedent in the Irish tradition. The Gai Bolga was originally the lance of the god Lug; it casts thunder and has the power to poison and to destruct, which needs to be attenuated with a certain mysterious procedure, lest it should burn the one who uses it. This lance is believed to have imparted the Dolorous Stroke, which endangered the regality and well-being of the court of the Round Table; it also wounded the Grail's king as well as Gawain during a night of unsuccessful tests.

The Cycle of the Grail

The "primordial state," in the "earthly paradise;" though he too lost it. Moreover, in a sense, it is still mysteriously present here on earth as the "stone of the exile." The tradition of the earthly paradise as a seat of the Grail corresponds to the tradition that identifies them with each other. Wolfram talks of the Grail as "such an august object the like of which is not found in heaven." In the *Queste du Graal*, Galahad, contemplating the Grail in the *palais espirituel*, experiences an awesome shudder and begs God to take him out of this life and to let him into heaven, having already fully known the mystery of the Grail. In the *Perceval li Gallais*, the castle of the Grail is named Eden. In the *Diu Crone* the quest leads Gawain to a country that "may well be considered the earthly paradise." During the fifteenth century Veldenaer relates that according to ancient sources, Lohengrin, the "knight of the swan;" "allegedly came from the Grail (dat Greal), which earlier on was called the earthly paradise; and yet it is not paradise, but a place of sin that is reached through great adventures and out of which, through great tribulations, one can leave." Thus the Grail, in one way or another, is also reconnected with the new attainment of the primordial state, which is represented by the earthly paradise.

I have already mentioned the tradition according to which Seth allegedly attained the Grail again in the earthly paradise. This is a very interesting motif, considering that Seth, in Hebrew, is a name susceptible to two opposite meanings: "ruin" and "upheaval" on the one hand, and "foundation" on the other hand. The first meaning points to the Luciferian substratum, to the wild warrior principle that is destined, through heroic reintegration, to change nature and be transformed into a foundation; hence, the second meaning of Seth as "foundation;" or "pole;" having an essential relation with the regal function generally conceived as an emanation of the power of the centre. In this we may encounter the interpretation of Wolfram's mysterious *lapsit exillis* as *lapis beryllus*, 'central stone;' and as '*lapis exillis*, "stone of the Lord." In some Syriac texts, mention is made of a precious stone that is the foundation, or centre of the world, hidden in the "primordial depths, near God's temple." It is put in relation with the body of the primordial man (Adam) and, interestingly enough, with an inaccessible mountain place, the access to which must not be revealed to other people; here Melchizedek, "in divine and eternal

5. The "knight of the swan;" named Elias or Lohengrin, comes from a place that is portrayed as the earthly paradise where the Grail is located (*annales quosdam veteres volunt prodidisse, Heliam istum e paradysi terrestris loco quodam fortunatissimo, cui Graele nomen esset, navigatio tali venisse*), as Arthur's seat, and as a mountain. The theme of the swan leads back to the same swan on which Apollo came from his Hyperborean seat, namely, from the solar island, which is the same as the is land of Avalon; the latter, through the theme of the knight of the swan, is connected to the Grail. service;" watches over Adam's body. In Melchizedek we find again the representation of the supreme function of the Universal Ruler, which is simultaneously regal and priestly;⁶ here this representation is associated with some kind of guardian of Adam's body who originally possessed the Grail and who, after losing it, no longer lives. This is found together with the motifs of a mysterious stone and an inaccessible seat.

I have previously pointed out that a "central" meaning is inherent to the symbolism of the heavenly stones that are to be found wherever a given race either embodied or intended to embody a polar function within the cycle of a given civilization. Thus from the Irish regal stone, which I have repeatedly mentioned, we go to the lapis niger that was put in ancient Rome at the beginning of the "sacred path"; to the black stone of Kaaba, a traditional centre of Islam; to the black stone transmitted (according to a legend) from the Universal Ruler to the Dalai Lama;⁷ to the sacred stone that in the Greek hymns is the altar and the house of Zeus and the "throne at the centre of the world"; and finally to the omphalos, the sacred stone of Delphi, the traditional centre of ancient Hellas, which was conceived also as the first postdiluvian creation of the primordial race, the race of Deucalion. ⁸

This sacred central stone (omphalos) was also called "betil;" betil being a stone that, like the Grail, represents victory. We learn from Pliny: "Sotacus et alia duo genera fecit cerauniae, nigrae rubentisque, similes eas esse securibus, ex his quae nigrae sint ac rotundae sacros esse, urbes per illas expugnari et classes, baetulos (betillos) vocari, quae vero longae sint ceraunias;" [Sotacus creates two other types of thundering objects, black and red. Those that are red are similar to an axe head. Those that are black are round and sacred, and it is through them that cities and fleets are defeated, and they are called baetulos (meteorite). Those that are drawn out are called ceraunias (thunderbolt).] ⁹ But the name *f3mrVAo~* is identical to the Hebrew *beth-el*, which means "the house of the Lord;" and suggests the famous story of Jacob, who "defeated an angel." Jacob named Bethel the region in which a sacred stone indicates the dreadful place where a ladder joins heaven and earth. "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;" says Jacob. And yet in Jacob we can still discern the Luciferian component proper to heroic realizations: his name means "usurper".¹¹ Jacob struggles with the angel and forces him to bless him; he manages to see "Elohim face to face" and "to save his life" by fighting against the divine. The angel says to him: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed."¹² Here we can notice a singular analogy between Jacob and Percival, who, despite scorning God, achieves his goal and asserts his election; likewise Jacob, by winning, obtains his blessing. I wish to point out an even more enigmatic correspondence: the king of the Grail, who waits to be healed, either limps or is wounded in the thigh. In Jacob's story, Jacob is wounded in the thigh by the angel and limps. When the angel "saw that he could not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him."¹³ Once again we find further connections that I cannot pursue or develop in this context.

Therefore, I wish to make this point: the Grail-betil is connected to the primordial state as a foundation, and in relation to this, like Jacob's stone, it represents something that unites heaven and earth, essentially under the sign of a supernatural-heroic victory and of a "central" function.

Moreover, it is clear that the tradition that makes of Seth a conqueror of the Grail is related to another tradition, according to which Seth allegedly took a sprout from the plant located in the middle of the Garden of Eden. From this sprout grew the tree that appears in the legends of

Prester John, Alexander, and the Great Khan in various forms, including that of the Dry Tree of the Empire.

Such a tree appears in the Grand Saint Graal, in the Queste du Graal and in Le Morte D'Arthur (17.5-7), in relation to the so-called ship of Solomon and to the test of the sword. This is a mysterious ship on board which are a bed, a golden crown, and a sword ornamented with "strange pendants." These pendants are made with three strands of different colours (white, red, and green), which were woven by Solomon or by his wife with branches of a tree grown from a sprout of the central tree of paradise, in three phases of its development. 14 The sword is that of David, the priestly king who was often confused.

14. The explanation given by the texts is an example of the coatings of Christian elements: the ship represents the Church, and the three colors are those which the tree assumed at the time of Eve, of the birth of Abel, and of his death at the hands of Cain. In this last regard, we could utilize the mention of a fratricidal struggle to which the Celtic story of the Dolorous Stroke may be referred. Most likely the meaning of the three colours will become apparent to those who associate them with the ones present, for instance, in the Hermetic Tradition. In the Hermetic Tradition the three colours designate three degrees of the initiatory development and of the work of the "stone" from the with the figure of Prester John. Is Here is a significant detail: the scabbard of this sword is named "memory of blood;" *memoire de sange*. An inscription warns that only one knight will be able to hold this sword; he will exceed all those who preceded him and who will follow him. The ship carrying these objects does not have a crew, since it was abandoned at sea and navigates under divine guidance. All this is clearly an equivalent of the "question that must be asked" as I will interpret it later; in other words, it apparently symbolizes the abandoned legacy of the primordial regal tradition, which awaits the chosen one who will restore it. Another equivalent symbol is Arthur's lost sword, which from time to time emerges out of the waters, flashing, awaiting the one who will wield it again. In the Grand Saint Graal this ship comes to get Nescien from the isle tornioante (an island that constantly rotates because it is fixed to the terrestrial magnet and eludes the influence of every element); analogously, in Le Morte D'Arthur (17.4) the ship comes from "parts west, that men call the Isle of Turnance." And so the motifs of the ancient Hebrew tradition merge with those of the Celtic-Hyperborean tradition, since the revolving island has the polar meaning of King Arthur's court, of the Round Table, of the wheel spinning before Frau Saelde, and of Avalon or the Glass Island or the Western Island.

The Grail reveals its meaning of "central stone;" and thus also of the Empire (*lapis erilis*), in the close association it has with the various themes and legends I have previously discussed. As a way of concluding this order of comparisons, I will recall that Alexander, like Seth, allegedly came close to the primordial center here on earth, to the earthly paradise, bringing back from it a stone with the same characteristics as those of the Grail, which Seth had previously taken from the same place: the stone is as bright as the sun, bestows an eternal youth, and grants victory. It is shaped like an eye (an allusion to the frontal eye?) or like an apple (the Hesperides?) or like a

sphere.¹⁶

Like Alexander's imperialness, however, Rome's too seems to have been enigmatically characterized by the legend with the same symbols that reemerge in the Grail cycle. As a pignus imperii, in order to ensure Rome's eternity, Numa allegedly received from the Olympian god a bowl forged out of a meteorite, that is, a "stone of heaven"; at the same time, it allegedly corresponded to an ancient bowl containing ambrosia, which was the nectar of the immortals. The albedo to the rubedo. After all, red is the colour of the Grail's "red knight." The theme of the fratricide probably refers to a test of arms ending in a usurpation, as I will explain in chapter 19.

bowl was guarded by the college of the Salii, who also guarded the hasta (lance). The Salii were twelve in number, the solar number that also appears in the Order of the Round Table and of the Grail itself. The heavenly stone, the bowl that provides supernatural nourishment, and the lance are three essential objects of the Nordic-medieval legend that can be found again as prophetic "signs" foretelling the mystery of Rome's origins and its destiny as a universal imperial centre.

There is an almost magical concordance of meanings among all these traditions, which are so removed from each other both in space and time.

The Doctrine of the "Immortal Body"

The initiatic teaching concerning immortality is not without relation to the doctrine of the triple body, which I will now briefly discuss.

First of all, the term "body" is taken analogically, to designate the "seats" that consciousness may assume, according to a possibility which, however, transcends that of the overwhelming majority of human beings. Hence such a doctrine, like all esoteric doctrines, is true only in an initiatic context. To speak of it in relation to ordinary man has no sense at all; for him there are no three, or seven, or nine "bodies," or however many are fancied by Theosophy, but simply the human state of consciousness, conditioned by its relation with the physical organism that everyone knows.

This organism can be seen, felt, described, and sensed by common man, but in reality he does not know anything about it (in our sense of "knowing"). Just as he does not understand the power due to which an arm can be moved at will (he may become aware of it in the event of a semiparalysis or a nervous illness), likewise he does not understand the power through which the heart beats. Thus, to common man, the body remains for the most part an unknown, enigmatic entity into which he mysteriously awakens and to which he finds himself connected.

Conversely, those who should find the way to shine a light in this deep and mysterious zone would develop a "knowledge" of the various bodies discussed by esoterism. These bodies, I wish to say from the start, are not other bodies, but rather other ways to live than which is commonly understood as a body. They are so many phases of the Great Work.

We have shown (chapter V) that real survival after death depends on a consciousness that has

isolated itself and endured without the support and the condition of the psychophysical organism. Those who have been able to do so are virtually “beyond the waters”; the failing of consciousness, therefore, is a fact of little consequence to them. I have also mentioned the possibility of aiming at pure liberation. The way leading to it lies in becoming free from all real and possible determinations, from conquest to conquest, from nudity to nudity, until the garment falls away through an absolute integration into “selfhood.” Then the formula “ego sum” (I am) is overcome, as the “sum” (am) becomes resolved into “est” (is). This is the point of the “Supreme Identity,” the Buddhist nirvana, and Plotinus’s “One.” In Hatha Yoga it is said: “Empty as a vase in the air—full as a vase in the ocean.”

Aside from this, there is the magical possibility of those who, having realized detachment, reestablish contact with the manifested world, intending to entirely assume and master, in all of the elements and processes, the form that acted as a basis of their human life. The action here shifts to that which could be called the “corpse”—hence in Chinese tradition the expression “the solution of the corpse” designating the Work. However, in virtue of the essential relations connecting macrocosm and microcosm, such an action works on the hierarchies that command the various elements of nature in general.

As a starting point, we need to emphasize that the individuality of the overwhelming majority of people is a fiction, their very unity being a fictitious and precarious unity of a mere aggregate of forces and influences that in no way can be said to belong to them. Abraxas (chapter I) has already pointed this out.

The forces on which man depends are first of all of a psychic order, and second of an organic order. To the first is connected everything that is related to passions, feelings, beliefs, natural affections, traditions, blood ties, and so on.

Ordinary man should never say, “I love,” but, “Love loves through me.” As the fire manifests itself in individual flames when the necessary conditions are present, likewise love (or better said, the being of love) manifests itself in individual beings who love with a love that transcends and transports them, in relation to which they are more or less passive. The same applies to hatred, fear, piety, etc. Nor is that all: every nation, every religion or traditional institution has its own “being”; the instinctive and deep reaction against an insult to one’s country, faith, or customs is the reaction of such beings and not, as it is commonly assumed, an individual reaction, proper to a distinct and autonomous Self.

Much less so is one truly a real individual as we descend into the depths of the organic being: circulatory, endocrine, and nervous systems, sleep, hunger, and so on. All this, in individuals, represents a transcendent and collective element, of which it is obvious that others, rather than the single Self, are the active and leading principle. The Self leans on all this, and neither is it nor dominates it. Thus its individual life is a mirage that endures until the dissolution of the contingent nexus of equilibrium that gives a relative stability and unity to its psycho-physical being, and until the various aggregated forces are reabsorbed into their respective “beings.”

These beings are not to be found just anywhere: they exist in thoughts, actions, passions, creations, bodily functions, and organs of human beings. They invisibly permeate and direct most of what is called ordinary life.

This is why he who really wants to live must first die, separating himself from this mêlée of influences and dependencies, and making his own the principle of a life that is of itself, and, thus, immortal. The “initiatic death” establishes man in the first element of this new life against which death will be powerless. But if immortality is to be more than the mere extension of consciousness, and if this consciousness is to be articulated in forms of action and expression proper to both planes, then it is necessary for that free and supernatural element to communicate its quality to various principles and forces present in the human aggregate. This is the essence of the theory of the magical body or resurrection body. What needs to be done is to re-create one’s body, to retrace its obscure and mystical process in virtue of which it organized itself (or better, was organized) and then lent to a Self; it needs to be retraced from the perspective of the principle that defeated death and that is of itself. The following phases of this process consist in the contact established with various beings, psychic at first, and then cosmic (gods), who rule over human beings and who act in their bodies and in their minds. The initiate, in this order of operations, must reaffirm his autonomy from them, even subjecting himself to those forces that used to be present in his organism. The Gnostics’ “vesture of glory” or “immortal body,” replacing the “form of slavery,” is the final consecration of those who victoriously pass this series of tests, thus becoming wholly emancipated from the spheres of “fate” and from the dominion of the various “Rulers” or “Archons.”

The immortal body is first of all a simple body, not composite, since the principle that pervades and entirely dominates it is simple; this principle replaces the multitude, often antagonistic, of influences and powers that dominated the human soul and body.

One might say that it is made of consciousness and power, no longer of matter. In fact, it is typical of traditional teaching to consider matter not as a distinct principle, coexisting with the spirit, but as a form or state, according to which the only reality, namely the spirit, experiences itself. It is simply that which is inert, passive, and unconscious in the spirit; as such, it may always be “resolved” or “reduced,” and this is precisely the case of the “magical body.” As an analogy, think of what happens in the so-called “ideomotoric reflexes”: if one assumes a state of complete relaxation and creates a vivid and fixed image of one’s arm rising up, one will in fact end up with a raised arm, in virtue of a direct power produced by that image, without making any conscious effort. Now imagine something similar for the whole body: namely, that the entire body, in the intimacy of its fibers, in all of its organs, functions, and movements, is assumed in the mind through an absolute and radiant image. Then the body would no longer exist as body; as its substance and basis it would only have this magical image: it would be a body directed, moved, and vivified by the mind. Its organs would be resolved in symbols or shaping ideas, which are the astral “signatures” or “names” of the beings to which they correspond. Hence, the name of *manomâyâkâya* (body made of mind) given in the East to the “immortal body,” also

called *mâyâvî-rûpa*, or “apparent form.”

The reason for this expression is clear. At this point it is the body that leans on the Self, rather than the other way around. If the Self should fail even for an instant, the body would collapse into nothingness. The Self has now taken the body upon itself, sustaining and commanding it, in the power of its own mind, just as ordinary consciousness does with an ordinary thought. To withdraw its image, to stop thinking it, would amount to make it disappear, without leaving behind a corpse (this operation was known in Taoism under the name of *s’i-kiai*, “the solution of the corpse”).

In this chapter we talk about the symbol of “salt,” which, in Hermeticism, usually designates the body or the physical element. The salt is the fixed, or the “necessary,” element, the quality of that which resists “Fire” and cannot be changed. Prison of the sleeping Sulfur, its “awakening” produces a virtue that reacts on it, turning it into a volatile—in other words, into a way of being characterized by freedom and by transformation of air. Likewise, the Gnostics’ “vesture of glory” was identified with the “body of freedom” (a term borrowed by St. Paul); its equivalent in Mahayana Buddhism is *nirmânakâya*, an expression that can be translated as “body of transformation.” In other words, the regenerated body, more than a body, is a power; or better, it is the body in the state of power. It coincides with the free possibility of manifesting itself in a body, but not necessarily in this one exclusively, nor only on the earthly plane.

The faculty of word is mine, insofar as I can shape it and manifest it as I please, or even suspend it in silence. The initiate who has devoted himself to these applications finds himself in an identical relationship with his own body: he does with it as he pleases. He can project it in one form or in another, make it appear or disappear, without himself undergoing any transformation. This is why in the Hellenistic mysteries we find the expression *seminarium* (from the Latin *semen* = seed) designating the magical body: this is not a particular and fixed body, but rather the active possibility, the seed for infinite bodies susceptible in theory to be shaped and “projected” by the mental substance through a congruous transformation.

This should not make us think that the magical body is unreal because it is apparent (*mâyâvî-rûpa*). Everything that is said about it does not refer to the visible physical qualities of such a body, which, in this regard, could also be identical, in a particular apparition, to some human and mortal body. It refers only to the function, transformed from passive into active, from necessary to free, according to which all these qualities are now subordinated to the central power. The fact that a thing falls under my power does not make it unreal, but rather supremely real. A body in which there is no longer “matter” and which is therefore “apparent” or “mental” simply signifies a body in which there is nothing left that resists the spirit, and which is simply given to the spirit: thus a perfect act. The transformation is not material but substantial—in the sense in which this term is used in Catholic theology when, in reference to the Eucharist, the identity and preservation of sensible attributes are retained in the Host, which nevertheless undergoes an essential transformation. It is a transubstantiation that occurs.

The magical body is invulnerable and immortal; only what is composed and dependent is liable to alteration and corruption.

This body can properly be called *vajra*, namely “diamond-thunderbolt,” something almost adamantine, incorruptible, made of power and fulminating light. In neo-Platonism, the “igneous body” or “radiant body” of the immortals has the same meaning and is connected to an analogous doctrine.

Finally, to think of a place and, at the same time, to be in real, effective presence in that place and in that time, is not a miraculous virtue, but rather a natural one for a body that is absorbed by the mind (or for what of it has been absorbed by the mind) and sustained only by its own image. It is where the mind is.

In regard to details, the “immortal body” has also been called “triple body.” He who is endowed with it is called “Lord of the Three Worlds.” The starting point, technically speaking, is the state of “nakedness” that is realized through the initiatic death and transferred from extra-bodily states to the earthly state of the initiate.

The first operation consists in shifting to a direct relationship with that of which the world of thoughts, representations, and emotions constitutes a simple, attenuated, particular reflection. For this purpose it is necessary to proceed to the “extraction of Mercury.” This process is first of all the realization of the “subtle” or “fluidic” state that acts as a mediator between the two worlds: that of sensible exteriority and that of solar immanence. Through this state it is possible to establish contact with the deep forces that are chained within the human organism, and eventually in the blood system, in the glandular system, and in the reproductive system, which have this double correspondence: 1) animal kingdom, plant kingdom, and mineral kingdom; 2) dreaming state, sleeping state, state of apparent death (see chapter V). In order to clarify this correspondence, I will say that the symbols or “names” that awaken by transforming into superconsciousness what for ordinary people is the dreaming state reveal the “types” of various animal species, namely the beings that dominate the various animal species, of which the single individuals are like “corpuscles” of their “bodies.” Such are the so-called sacred or living animals (usually made to correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac), which the initiate “marries,” in other words, “possesses,” sealing his own body with this “marriage.” The same can be said for the other two stages, in the last of which appears the creative original force, or dragon (which the Sepher Yetzirah places “at the center of the universe, like a King on his throne”), Sacred Fire, “Ur,” or kundalini. Moving through the various “centers,” it actualizes the septenary hierarchy (seven planets, seven angels, etc.) and this means to extend the “magical resurrection of the flesh” to the transcendental plane, thus making it absolute.

Then it begins by reassuming the world of forms and finite beings subject to generation and corruption, namely the caused or generated world; correspondingly, to employ Mahayana terminology, it causes to shine the *nirmānakāya*, the magical or apparent body capable of transformation and appropriate action. Second, it reassumes the intermediate world of

“elementating elements,” of that which has form and that which does not, of the “spiritual sound”; correspondingly, it is the essence made of fullness, of free enjoyment, of radiance of the sambhogakâya, an invisible, purely intellectual “body.” Third, it reassumes the world of illumination and “emptiness” that simultaneously is and is not, that is uncontaminated, transcendent; correspondingly, it actualizes the dharmakâya, or supreme “body” made of law, which is associated with the Vajra-dhâra, the inconceivable “Lord of the Scepter,” also known as svabhâvakâya, namely the pure mode of what is in itself. But this body, which is one and triple, is the same “immortal body” of the “Lord of the Three Worlds.”

Enough of Illusions

Not many illusions can remain concerning the sort of ‘morality’ which can support this endeavour, and which no industrial mobilisation, with atomic bombs, flying super-fortresses, supersonic fighters, and so on, can replace. It is with these ‘trump cards’ alone that the ‘Western world’ now stands on the threshold of a possible third world-wide cataclysm, having broken down and insulted everything which had survived from the authentic warrior traditions of Europe and the Far East.

In the opposing bloc, there are forces which combine technology with the elemental force of fanaticism, of dark and savage determination, and of the contempt for individual life found among masses which, whether through their own ancient traditions or through the exaltation of the collectivist ideology, hardly value their own existence. This is the tide which will swell forth, not only from the red East, but from the whole of a contaminated and unleashed Asia.

However, what is really required, to defend ‘the West’ against the sudden rise of these barbaric and elemental forces, is the strengthening, to an extent perhaps still unknown to Western man, of a heroic vision of life. Apart from the military-technical apparatus, the world of the ‘Westerners’ has at its disposal only a limp and shapeless substance – and the cult of the skin, the myth of ‘safety’ and of ‘war on war’, and the ideal of the long, comfortable, guaranteed, ‘democratic’ existence, which is preferred to the ideal of the fulfillment which can be grasped only on the frontiers between life and death, in the meeting of the essence of living with the extreme of danger.

Some will object that, after all that Europe has been through, we have had enough of ‘militarism’ and war-mongering, and ‘total war’ should be left in the past and forgotten. Granted, ‘militarism’ can be left behind us, since it is only a degraded, inferior echo of a heroic (and far from exclusively belligerent) conception, and to condemn all heroism as ‘militarism’ is one of the expedients of ‘democratic’ propaganda, an expedient which has now begun to backfire on its proponents. In any case, unfortunately, there probably won’t be any choice. It will be hard for the forces already in motion to stop (in general, irrespective of the outcome of the current Korean affair) and there will only remain one course of action: to ride the tiger, as the Hindu expression puts it.

One the most highly praised contemporary writers in Europe has written things about modern war, which he experienced thoroughly and actively (he volunteered, was injured eighteen times, and was awarded the highest German distinction of merit), whose value will become more and more obvious in the times to come. He has said that modern man, by creating the world of technology and putting it to work, has signed his name to a debt which he is now required to pay. Technology, his creature, turns against him, reduces him to its own instrument, and threatens him with destruction. This fact manifests itself most clearly in modern war: total, elemental war, the merciless struggle with materiality itself. Man has no choice but to confront this force, to render himself fit to answer this challenge, to find in himself hitherto unsuspected spiritual dimensions, to awake to forms of extreme, essentialised, heroism, forms which, while caring nothing for his person, nevertheless actualise what the aforementioned author calls the ‘absolute person’ within him, thus justifying the whole experience.

There is nothing else one can say. Perhaps this challenge will constitute the positive side of the game, for especially qualified men, given that game must be accepted and played out anyway. The preponderance of the negative part, of pure destruction, may be frightening, infernal. But no other choice is given to modern man, since he himself is the sole author of the destiny the aspect of which he is now starting to see.

This is not the moment to dwell on such prospects. Besides, what we have said does not concern any nation in particular, nor even the present time. It concerns the time when things will become serious, globally, not merely for the interests of the bourgeois, capitalist world, and what those men must know, who, at that point, will still be able to gather in an unshakeable bloc.

The word ‘ascesi’ – from ‘askésis’, ‘to train’ – originally meant only ‘training’ and, in the Roman sense, ‘discipline’. The corresponding Indo-Aryan is ‘tapas’ (‘tapa’ or ‘tapo’ in Pāli) and means the same except that, because of the root, ‘tap’, which means ‘to be hot’ or ‘to glow’, it also contains the idea of an intensive concentration, of glowing, almost of fire.

With the development of Western civilization, however, the word ‘ascesis’ has, as is well known, taken on a particular meaning which differs from the original. Not only it has assumed an exclusively religious sense, but, because of the general tone of the faith which has come to predominate among Western peoples, asceticism has become connected to ideas of mortification of the flesh and of painful renunciation of the world : thus, it has come to indicate the path that this faith thinks the most suitable for ‘salvation’, and the reconciliation of the creature, corrupted by original sin, with his Creator. As early as the beginnings of Christianity the word ‘ascesis’ was applied to those who practised exercises of mortification such as auto-flagellation.

Asceticism in this sense became the object of clear aversion with the growth of specifically modern civilization. If even Luther, with the resentment of one who was unable to understand or to tolerate monastic discipline, disowned the necessity, the value, and the usefulness of any ascesis, to oppose to it an exaltation of pure faith, then humanism, immanentism, and the new cult of life were brought from their standpoint to bring discredit and scorn upon asceticism,

which those tendencies associated more or less with ‘medieval obscurantism’ and with the aberrations of ‘historically outdated ages’. And when asceticism was not explained away purely and simply as a pathological manifestation, a transposed form of auto-sadism, all sorts of incompatibilities and oppositions to ‘our way of life’ were claimed for it. The best known and the oldest of these is the antithesis supposed to exist between the ascetic, renouncing, static East, hostile to the world, and the active, assertive, heroic and creative Western civilisation.

Unfortunate prejudices such as these succeeded in gaining a foothold in minds such as that of Friedrich Nietzsche, who sometimes believed seriously that asceticism was merely something for the “pallid enemies of life”, the weak and disinherited, and those who, in their hatred of themselves and the world, had undermined with their ideas the civilisations created by a higher humanity. Lately, ‘climatic’ interpretations of asceticism have even been tried. Thus, according to Günther, when the Indo-Germans found an enervating climate in the Asiatic lands they had conquered, to which they were not accustomed, they gradually became inclined to consider the world as suffering and to turn their originally life-affirming energies towards the pursuit, by means of various ascetic disciplines, of ‘liberation’. It is not worth discussing the level to which asceticism has been brought by the new ‘psycho-analytic’ interpretations.

A tight net of misunderstanding and prejudice has thus been drawn around asceticism in the West. The one-sided meaning given to asceticism in Christianity, and the fact that it is often associated therein with actually deviated forms of spiritual life, has produced reactions which bring out – not without a certain anti-traditional and profane animus – only the negative effect of this particular sort of asceticism on the modern spirit.

However, our contemporaries, by a sort of inversion, have again taken up expressions of the previous terminology, though adapting them to the entirely materialistic plane which is peculiar to them. Thus, they speak of a “mystique of progress”, a “mystique of science”, a “mystique of labour” and so on, and likewise of an “ascesis of sport”, an “ascesis of social service”, and even of an “ascesis of capitalism”. In spite of the confusion of ideas, here a certain return to the original of the word ‘ascesis’ reveals itself : this modern use of this word actually implies the simple idea of training, of intensive application of forces, not without a certain impersonality, a neutralisation of the purely individual and hedonistic element.

However, it is appropriate that nowadays the most qualified minds should be enabled to understand once again what asceticism means in more comprehensive terms, and what it can mean within a framework of hierarchically organised planes, independently of both the merely religious conceptions of the Christian type and the modern desecrations ; with reference, instead, to more original traditions, and to the highest conception of the world and of life peculiar to other Indo-European civilisations. As we wish to discuss asceticism in this sense, we asked ourselves : what historical expression can furnish the most suitable basis for the exposition of a comprehensive and objective system of asceticism, clear, unattenuated, in tested and well-

structured forms, true to the spirit of Aryan man, and yet capable of relation to the conditions of modern times?

The answer to this question at which we finally arrived is the following : more than any other, the ‘Doctrine of Awakening’, in its original form, satisfies all these conditions. The ‘Doctrine of Awakening’ is the real signification of what is commonly called Buddhism. The word ‘Buddhism’ is derived from the Pâli designation ‘Buddha’ (Sanskrit ‘Buddha’) given to its founder, which, however, is not so much a name as a title. ‘Buddho’, from the root ‘budh’, ‘to awaken’, means the ‘Awakened One’ ; it is thus a designation applied to one who has reached this spiritual realisation – assimilated by analogy to an ‘arousing’ or ‘awakening’ – which was pointed out by Prince Siddharta. It is thus Buddhism in its original form – so-called ‘Pâli Buddhism’ – which shows as very few other doctrines do the required characteristics ; that is, (1) it contains a complete ascetic system ; (2) this system is objective and realistic ; (3) it is purely Aryan in spirit ; (4) it is practicable within the general conditions of the particular historical cycle of which the present humanity is part.

We have spoken of various meanings which asceticism considered as a whole can have within a framework of hierarchically organised planes. In itself, that is as ‘exercise’, as discipline, asceticism aims to subject all the forces of the human being to a central principle. In this respect we can speak of a true technique, which has in common with that of the present mechanical achievements the features of objectivity and impersonality. Thus, eyes trained to separate the accessory from the essential will easily manage to recognise a ‘constant’ beyond the multiple variety of ascetic forms adopted by this or that tradition.

In the first place, all the religious conceptions or ethical interpretations with which asceticism is associated in very many cases can be regarded as accessory. Leaving these aside, we can conceive of and systematically describe asceticism, so to speak, in a pure state, that is to say, as an ensemble of methods aimed at the production of an inner force, whose use, in principle, remains completely undetermined, like the use of the arms and the machines created by modern technique. Thus, if ‘ascetic’ reinforcement of the personality is the premise of every transcendental realisation, whether the latter is determined by one or another historical tradition, it can likewise be of great value on the plane of those temporal realisations and struggles which completely absorb modern Western man. Furthermore, we could even conceive an ‘ascesis of evil’, since the technical conditions, as we may call them, needed to achieve important results in the direction of ‘evil’ are no different from those which must be realised by those who strive instead to reach for instance ‘sainthood’. Did not Nietzsche himself, who, as we have said, partly shared the prejudice against asceticism widespread in many modern circles, take into account disciplines and forms of self-control which, basically, have an ascetic character, when forming the concepts of the ‘superman’ and the ‘will to power’? Thus, at least within certain limits, the saying of an old medieval tradition might be quoted: “One the art, one the material, one the crucible”.

We find specifically in the ‘doctrine of awakening’, that is, in Buddhism, as in few other great

historical traditions, the possibility of isolating clearly the elements of asceticism in the pure state. It has been quite accurately said that, in it, the problems of asceticism “have been posed and resolved so clearly and, one could almost say, so logically, that, in comparison, other mysticisms appear incomplete, fragmentary and inconclusive, and that, as opposed to any obtrusive emotional and sentimental element, a style of intellectual clarity, rigour and objectivity predominates, which reminds one of the modern scientific mentality” (1). We want to bring out two points specifically.

First, the Buddhist asceticism is conscious, in the sense that in many forms of asceticism – and in the Christian ones almost without exception – the accessory is inextricably interwoven with the essential, and ascetic realisations are, so to speak, indirect, because they result from impulses and movements of the soul determined by suggestions or by religious raptures, while in Buddhism they result from direct action, based on a knowledge which is conscious of its aim and develops itself through controlled processes from beginning to end. “Just as a practised turner or turner’s apprentice, when turning quickly, knows ‘I am turning quickly’, and when turning slowly, knows ‘I am turning slowly’”. And “as a practised butcher or butcher’s apprentice who butchers a cow, takes it to the market-place and dissects it piece by piece ; he knows these parts, he looks at them and examines them well and then sits down” – here, two efficacious similes, among many others, are typical of the style of consciousness of all of the ascetic and contemplative procedures in the doctrine of awakening (2). Another is that of clear and transparent water, through which everything lying on the bottom can be seen : the symbol of a soul which has eliminated all unrest and confusion (3). And it will be seen that this style is reasserted everywhere, on every plane of Buddhist discipline. This is why it has been stated rightly that “this path through consciousness and awakening is as clearly described as a road on an accurate map, along which every tree, every bridge and every house is marked” (4).

In the second place, the collusions between asceticism and morality are avoided in few other systems as in Buddhism, and one is thus made conscious of the purely instrumental value of the latter for the former. Any ethical precept is regarded here solely according to the consideration of the positive ‘ascetic’ effects which result from following it or not doing so. It can thus be said that here not only all religious mythology, but also all ethical mythology, are left behind. In Buddhism, the elements of *sīla*, that is, of “right conduct”, are considered purely as “instruments of the soul” (5) : it is not a question of ‘values’, but rather of ‘instruments’, instruments of a *virtus*, not in the moralistic sense, but in the ancient sense of virile energy. Hence the well-known simile of the raft : the one who, having built a raft to cross a dangerous river, would be a fool if, to go further, he were to put it on his shoulders. Buddhism teaches this also of what is good or evil, just or unjust, according to purely ethical views (6).

Thus it can be affirmed with good reason that in Buddhism – as in Yoga – asceticism is raised to the dignity and impersonality of a science : what is elsewhere fragment here becomes system ; what is elsewhere impulse or transport becomes conscious technique ; the spiritual labyrinth of

souls which attain only through ‘grace’ (since it is only by means of suggestions, fears, hopes, and raptures, that they are led accidentally onto the right way) is replaced by a calm and even light which prevails even in abysmal depths, and by a method which does not need external supports.

All this, however, refers only to the first aspect of asceticism, the most elementary in the hierarchical order. Once ascesis is understood as a technique for the conscious production of a force which can be applied, in principle, to any level, the disciplines considered in the doctrine of awakening appear to us with a degree of crystalline independence which is hard to surpass. However, a distinction between the disciplines which ‘apply to life’ and those which apply to what is beyond life is encountered within the system itself. The use which is made of ascetic achievements in Buddhism is essentially an ‘upward’ one. Here is how the canon gives the sense of such achievements : “And he reaches the admirable path discovered by the intensity, the constancy, and the concentration of the will, the admirable path discovered by the intensity, the constancy, and the concentration of the energy, the admirable path discovered by the intensity, the constancy, and the concentration of the soul, the admirable path discovered by the intensity, the constancy, and the concentration of the investigation – with a heroic spirit as the fifth.” And it adds : “And thus attaining these fifteen heroic qualities, he is able, O disciples, to achieve liberation, to achieve awakening, to attain the incomparable sureness.” (8). Two possibilities are considered in this connection in another text : “Either certainty in life, or no return after death.” (9). If, in an eminent manner, ‘sureness’ is linked with the state of ‘awakening’, then, referring to a more relative plane, the alternative can be more mundane, and can be thought of as a sureness in life, created by a first group of ascetic disciplines and able to give proof of itself in any field, but which, however, is regarded essentially as a presupposition for an ascesis of a transcendent character. Thus, the tradition speaks of an “intensive application”, conceived of as keystone of the whole system, which, “developed and often practised, leads to two-fold health, health in the present and health in the future.” (10). ‘Sureness’ in ascetic development – bhāvanā – is connected with unshakeable calm – samatha – which can be considered as the highest aim of a ‘neutral’ discipline, and which can be pursued even by one who yet remains, in the essence, a “son of the world” – putthujana. Beyond this there is the unshakeable calm – samatha – which, associated with knowledge – vipassanā – leads to the “Great Liberation” (11).

Here we have, then, a new concept of ascesis, hierarchically superior to the previous one, which takes us to the supra-sensual and supra-individual order ; and, at the same time, the reason why, in this higher order also, Buddhism gives positive points of reference, as few other traditions do, becomes clear. The fact is that Buddhism in its original form is distinguished from all mere ‘religion’, all mysticism in the most widespread sense of the word, all systems of ‘faith’ or devotion, and all dogmatic rigidity. And even when dealing with what is no longer of this life, what is ‘more-than-life’, Buddhism, the ‘Doctrine of Awakening’, appears to us to possess those features of severity and unadornedness which characterise all that is monumental, the atmosphere of clarity and strength which is peculiar to what can be called, in general, ‘classical’, and a virility and courage which could seem Promethean were it not essentially Olympian. But,

to be able to realise all this, various additional prejudices must be removed. Once again, there are two points to be made.

Some have claimed that Buddhism, in its essence and in its original form – leaving aside, thus, the later popular Buddhism characterised by the deification of its founder – is not a religion. This is true. However, we must be quite clear as to what we consider this assertion to imply on the plane of values.

From a general point of view, Western peoples are so accustomed to the religion which has come to predominate in their own countries that they regard it as a kind of unit of measure and model for every other religion. If the result of this has been that the most ancient Western traditions – to start with the Hellenic and the Roman – were no longer understood in their real significance or their effective value (12), it is easy to imagine what was to happen to older and often more remote traditions, such as those created by Indo-European races in Asia. Really, however, this attitude must be reversed : as ‘modern’ civilisation represents an anomaly when compared with previous civilisations of a traditional type (13), the significance and the value of the Christian religion should be measured according to what might subsist in it from a vaster, clearer, more primordial and less human conception of the supernal.

Without dwelling on this point, which we have already dealt with in other occasions, we will only indicate the arbitrariness of the identification of religion in general with theistic religion based on faith (14). The term ‘exoterism’ can well be applied to this type of religion, and if one considers the sentimental, sub-intellectual, irrational and passive elements in it, which no scholastic systematisation will ever manage to resolve fully, and which are rarely absent even from the rarest mystical attainments, it may well seem the height of presumption to claim for this system the character of a higher religion, and even of the ultimate religion (15).

It is certainly to be acknowledged that in some cases such religious forms are necessary ; the East itself has known them, in later times, in, for instance, the way of devotion, or *bhakti-mârga* (from ‘bhaj’, ‘to adore’), of Râmânuja, certain forms of the Shakti cult, and an altered form of Buddhism itself, Amidism (16). But in any normal and complete civilisation these devotional forms will be conceived solely for the mass, and other points of reference, other paths, will be indicated for those who have a different vocation and qualification. Such is the case of Buddhism, and it is in this sense, and only in this sense, that it can be said that – as long as it remains in the original and authentic form, to which our treatment and our interpretation will be limited – it is not a ‘religion’.

In this respect, it should be noted that the central concept of Buddhism, that of ‘awakening’, has a metaphysical rather than religious character, which maintains an extremely precise difference from everything which is ‘religious’ in the narrow, devotional, and, especially, Christian sense. We are in front of a doctrine for which the human condition is something to be overcome, and is not in any way the effect of a ‘sin’, of a transgression – this is the fundamental motive of religion

– to be redressed by ‘repentance’ and waiting for, or praying for, gratuitous ‘grace’ or ‘salvation’. Buddhism is part of the central tradition of Hindu metaphysics, in that it considers the average human condition to be the result of ‘ignorance’, of not-knowing, not of ‘sin’. A darkening or oblivion arisen in the being (here, it is needless to examine its causes and its modalities) determine the human condition in its caducity and contingency. The aim is solely to destroy this ignorance, this oblivion, sleep, or blackout, it being given that one does not accept the state of existence in which one finds himself. Likewise, the Hellenic initiate drinks from the fountain of memory in order to recover his original nature, similar to that of the gods. Any moral mythology is thus excluded on this path. An attitude of the centrality of the subject persists in it. The ‘sinful’ creature, placed in front of the theistic divinity or ‘saviour’, has no part in it. This is a typical feature, which can be considered to be among those which define ‘Aryanity’, i.e., the aristocratic nature of the doctrine preached by Prince Siddhartha.

This suffices to cover the first point. The second point does not concern the orientation of the individual, but the place which, doctrinally, must be ascribed to theism, or to theistically-based religion. Here however the situation is analogous. The theistic conception corresponds to an incomplete vision of the world, because it is devoid of its supreme hierarchical apex.

Metaphysically, the conception of being in the terms of a personal god is not such that, beyond it, there is no longer anything of which one can gain knowledge. To conceive of what lies beyond both such being and its opposite, non-being, as the supreme summit, is peculiar to a spirituality of a higher type, and to those ‘internal doctrines’ which, in any complete tradition, rise beyond the cult of the masses. These latter do not deny the theistic point of view but, recognising its right hierarchical place, subordinate it to a really transcendent conception.

This conception, on the other hand, was not unknown to the West itself. Leaving aside the Platonic ‘hen’, placed beyond the ‘on’, a certain mysticism, concerned with so-called “negative theology” can be mentioned, and so can Dionysius the Areopagite and, to a certain extent, Scotus Origenus ; one can refer to the abysmal and shapeless divinity, the Gottheit in the neuter, above the theistic Gott of German mysticism (which corresponds to the neuter Brahman, above Brahman, or Ishvara, the personal god, of Hindu speculation). However, the doctrine of the Christianised West was far from according to this transcendence its proper dignity and its proper hierarchical place. It had little or no effect on the essentially ‘religious’ orientation of the Western soul ; its only effect has been to carry a few men, via confused attempts and scattered intuitions or transports, beyond the frontiers of ‘orthodoxy’.

This is the clarification which it is necessary to make when one finds a doctrine accused of not being a religion, if not bluntly being accused of being an atheism, because it is not a theistic religion. The considerations which we have just offered apply to a wide range of instances, and with exactitude to the original Buddhism. An absolutely unique example is to be seen in it. Basically, the ground most conducive to metaphysical conceptions and to such an inner orientation as we have just described is that of an ‘esotericism’, an internal doctrine reserved for a limited circle of initiates. In Buddhism we find the same considerations, instead, at the origin

of a great historical tradition, with unmistakable features, in spite of the fatal alteration which, like many teachings, they were to undergo in subsequent forms, both philosophical or popular.

To amplify the last point we have examined, the recognition of that which is “beyond both being and non-being” opens to ascetic realisation possibilities unknown to the world of theism. The perception of this apex, in which the distinction between ‘creator’ and ‘creature’ becomes metaphysically meaningless, allows the creation of a whole system of spiritual realisations which turn out to be difficult to understand on the basis of ‘religious’ categories ; and, above all, it permits what, in mountaineering jargon, one would call a direct ascent, that is, an ascent up the bare mountaintop, without supports, without deviations to one side or another. This is exactly the meaning of Buddhist asceticism, no longer seen as a mere discipline generating strength, sureness, and unshakeable calm, but as a system of spiritual realisation. Buddhism – and this too we shall see clearly later – carries the will for the unconditioned to limits which are almost beyond the imagination of the modern West. And in this ascent alongside the abyss it rejects any ‘mythology’, it proceeds by means of pure strength, it drives away any mirage, it rids itself of any residual human weakness, it maintains the style of pure knowledge. This is why the Awakened, buddho, the Victor, jina, could be called he whose way is unknown to men, angels, and to Brahmā – which is the Sanskrit name for the theistic god, equivalent to Ishvara – himself. Certainly, this path is not without dangers, yet it is the one which suits the virile soul – viriya-magga. The texts say very clearly that the doctrine is meant “for the wise man, the expert, not for the ignorant, the inexpert” (17). The simile of the cutting grass is used : “As kusa grass when wrongly grasped cuts the hand, so the ascetic life wrongly practised leads to infernal torments” (18). The simile of the serpent is used ; “As a man who wants serpents goes out for serpents, looks for serpents, and finding a powerful serpent grasps it by the body or by the tail ; and the serpent striking at him bites his hand or arm or other part so that he suffers death or mortal anguish – and why is this? Because he wrongly grasped the serpent – so there are men who are harmed by the doctrines. And why is this? because they wrongly grasped the doctrines” (19).

It must thus be quite clear that the doctrine of awakening as such is not opposed as one particular religion to other religions. Even in the world in which it was born, it respected the various divinities and the popular cults of religious character which were linked with them. It understood the value of ‘works’. Virtuous and devout men go to ‘heaven’ – but the path taken by the Awakened Ones differs from theirs (20). They go beyond as “a fire which, little by little, consumes every bond” (21), both human and divine. And it is basically the innate style of a superior soul which brings it about that, in the texts, no sign of abandon, no sentimentalism, and no devout effusion, no private conversation with a god, so to speak, is found, although everything gives the feeling of a strength inexorably directed toward the unconditioned.

We have thus clarified the first three reasons why Buddhism in particular is recommended as the basis for the exposition of a complete system of asceticism. Summing up, the first reason consists in the possibility of extracting easily from Buddhism the elements of an asceticism as objective technique for the achievement of a calm, a strength and a detached superiority, each one capable

in itself of use in any direction. The second reason lies in the fact that in Buddhism the concept of ascesis can at once develop into that of a path of spiritual realisation completely free from any ‘mythology’, whether religious, theological, or ethical. The third reason, finally, is that the ultimate term of such a path corresponds to the Supreme of a truly metaphysical conception of the universe, to a transcendence asserted well beyond the simply theistic conception. Thus, while the Buddha considers the tendency to dogmatise to be a bond, and opposes the empty self-sufficiency of those who proclaim : “Only this is truth, foolishness is the rest” (22), he still maintains firmly the awareness of his own dignity : “perhaps you may wish, disciples, thus knowing, thus understanding, to return for your salvation to the rites and the fantasies of the ordinary penitent or priest?” – “No, indeed” is the answer – “Is it thus then, disciples : that you speak only of that on which you yourselves have meditated, which you yourselves have known, which you yourselves have understood,” – “Even so, Master.” – “This is well, disciples. Remain, then, endowed with this doctrine, which is visible in this life, timeless, inviting, leading onward, intelligible to all intelligent men. If this has been said, for this reason has it been said” (23). And again : “There are penitents and priests who exalt liberation. They speak in various manners glorifying liberation. But as for that which concerns the most noble, the highest liberation, I know that none equals me, let alone that I may be surpassed” (24). This has been called, in tradition, “the lion’s roar”.

- (1) B. Jansink, ‘La mistica del buddismo’, Bocca, Turin, 1925, p. 304.
- (2) Majjhima-nikâya, 10.
- (3) Cf., e.g., Jâtaka, 185.
- (4) E. Reinholt, in the introduction to the works of K.E. Neumann quoted by G. De Lorenzo, ‘I discorsi di Buddhò’, Laterza, Bari, 1925, vol. 2, p. 15.
- (5) Majjhima-nikâya, 53.
- (6) Ibid., 22.
- (7) Cf., e.g., Majjhima-nikâya, 53.
- (8) Majjhima-nikâya, 16.
- (9) Ibid., 10.
- (10) Anguttara-nikâya, 3.65 ; 10.15. Cf. Samyutta-nikâya, 35.198, where the disciplines are stated to be valid for this life since, in it, they create self-possession, while building a solid base for the destruction of the âsava, that is, for the transcendent goal.
- (11) In Anguttara-nikâya, 4.170, it is said that the bonds vanish and the path opens when samatha is combined with vipassanâ.
- (12) Cf. W.F. Otto, ‘Die Götter Griechenlands’, 1935, 1, 2 and passim.
- (13) Cf. R. Guénon, ‘Orient et Occident’, Paris, 1924 ; ‘La Crise du monde moderne’, Paris, 1925.

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- (14) P. Dahlke, ‘Buddhismus als Religion und Moral’, Munich-Neubiberg, 1923, p.11.
- (15) Cf. J. Evola, ‘L’arco et la clava’, Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, 1995, chap.4 (N.d.E.).
- (16) Cf. J. Evola, ‘Lo yoga della potenza’ (1949), Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, chap. 15 (N.d.E.).
- (17) Majjhima-nikâya, 2.
- (18) Dhammapada, 311.
- (19) Majjhima-nikâya, 22.
- (20) Dhammapada, 126.
- (21) Dhammapada, 31.
- (22) Cf., e.g., Suttanipâta, 4.12 ; 13.17-19.
- (23) Majjhima-nikâya, 38.
- (24) Dîgha-nikâya, 8.21

Faces & Mud

One of the episodes that best characterizes the spirit of Bolshevism is the so-called “Vavilov case.” Professor Nikolai Vavilov was a Russian biologist who was deported to Siberia along with other colleagues of his, not for strictly political reasons, but simply for being an exponent of the theory of genetics. Genetics is a branch of biology that admits the existence of pre-formation in human beings, i.e., of predispositions and traits that are internal, congenital (based on “genes”), not derived from external factors.

Genetics was declared “counter-revolutionary.” Marxism has it that everything that a man is, is the result of environmental factors — economic and social forces and conditions in particular. On this basis, communists seriously believe they can create a new humanity, a collective proletarian man, liberated from “the individualistic accidents of the bourgeois era.” This assumption, however, would be thwarted if one were to admit that man has an inner form, that persons exist, with their own nature, their own quality and, so to speak, their own fate, rather than the atoms of a mass ready to be subjected to an external, mechanical action, through which the desired collective would be produced. A timely campaign, led by a Marxist biologist, Trofim Lysenko, exposed the dangerous seed of heresy contained in the theory (albeit merely anthropological) of genetics, and Professor Vavilov was whisked off to Siberia, the place where minds are “re-educated” in Russia today.

One of the theories that best expresses the North American mindset is “behaviourism,” in combination with the views of John Dewey. According to this theory, anyone can become whatever they want, by undergoing an appropriate pedagogical and technical process. If a particular person is what he is, if he has certain talents, if he is, say, a thinker, or an artist, or a

statesman, it does not depend on his nature, and is not the sign of any real difference. Anyone can be like him, if they only really want to, and if only they know how to “train themselves.” This, clearly, is the truth of the self-made man, extended from the level of practical success and social climbing to all other domains, corroborating the egalitarian dogma of democracy. If such a theory is valid, one can no longer speak of real differences, differences in nature and of dignity. Every man can presume to possess, virtually, everything that another man is, the terms “superior” and “inferior” lose their meaning, every feeling of distance and respect becomes unjustified, every path is open to all, one really is in a condition of “freedom.”

Thus, we are faced with a fundamental view in which Bolshevism and Americanism coincide. Like the Bolshevik-Marxist ideology, the American theory expresses an intolerance with regard to everything in man that has a face, an internal form, a distinctive and unmistakable quality. Correspondingly, the organic conception is countered with a mechanistic conception, since everything that can be set up starting from almost nothing can only have the character of something “constructed.”

It is true that in the American view, there is an appearance of activism and individualism which can be misleading. But in practice, one sees what this really means, in Americans. They are the living refutation of the Cartesian axiom, “I think, therefore I am,” since “they do not think, and yet they are.” Infantile and “natural,” the way a vegetable is natural, the American psyche is perhaps even more formless than the Slavic psyche. It is open to every form of standardization, from the Reader’s Digest type of culture to social conformity, manipulated public opinion, advertising and the delusion of democratic progress. It is against this background that the theory mentioned previously must be understood. The counterpart of “I can be what anyone is” and egalitarian education is a qualitative regression: the man who has become inwardly formless.

This man, then, is what both communism and Americanism want — setting aside differences which do not concern the essential. The two views which we have spoken of have both a symbolic value and an aggressive vector of efficacy. They are both a categorical contradiction of the traditional ideal of personality, and they attack, at its foundation, everything in which man today can still find a defense and a means of reacting against the chaos of his civilization.

Indeed, at a time in which not only idols have fallen, but many ideas and values are compromised by rhetoric and inherent insincerity, only one way still remains open: to look within oneself for that order and that law, which have become problematic in the surrounding world. But this also means: being able to find in oneself a form and a truth, and impose it on oneself, realize it. “Know thyself in order to be thyself” — this was once the watchword of classical civilization. “May our thoughts and our actions be ours, may the actions of each man belong to him” — wrote Plotinus, and the Roman-Germanic world, up to Nietzsche, upheld the ideal of inner form, of difference, of fidelity to what one is, in opposition to every tendency towards disorder.

Does all this pertain only to the domain of individual ethics? Hardly. If we look for the root

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causes of the current disorder, rampant in the economic and social field to the point of precluding any possibility of a healthy, balanced existence, we find them in the mass betrayal of the aforementioned traditional ideal. Men do not know and no longer want to know what they are, and hence no longer know the place appropriate to them in the whole, in the fixed framework within which they can, without being distracted, develop their being and its possibilities and realize their own perfection, enough to really endow their lives with meaning and interiority, and at the same time actualize the part that corresponds to them in a hierarchically ordered world. Is this not what paved the way for the “economic era,” culminating, on the one hand, in the paroxysm of unbridled capitalism, and on the other, in livid class hatred? Is it not in this way that we have arrived at a world composed mainly of the agitated and the displaced, a world in which what matters is no longer “being,” but getting to this or that position?

But if that is the case — and if one reflects a little, it is impossible not to recognize it — is one not deluding oneself and deluding others when one sets one’s hopes in the power of one system or another, before there has been a detoxification and rectification in the internal domain of attitudes, interests, and the meaning of life?

Of course, this cannot be expected of the majority, and it cannot occur instantaneously. It is, however, always possible to provide the best men with an orientation. One can show that when one no longer has one’s own path, when one gives in to the fascination of external forms of growth, self-affirmation and production, one opens oneself to the forces that, even on the biological plane, turn the Marxist and democratic doctrine into a reality: the doctrine of formless being, of a world of atoms, of masses and mud, instead of men and faces. Whether to stop, and find once again the foundation for a just strength in one’s own way of being and in one’s own balanced tension, or — despite believing that one is doing something completely different — to give new fuel to a collectivizing process that is now consuming the world everywhere, is what each man must decide for himself, but it is also a premise, if what he might represent in political struggle is to acquire a real basis, a form and a prestige and, ultimately, determine the structures that must exist between men and the leaders of men.

Source: Julius Evola, *Ricognizioni: uomini e problemi* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1974).

Karma and Reincarnation

At the centre of its doctrine, Theosophy, as we mentioned, intended to bring the attention of modern men back to the truths of a forgotten wisdom, in regard to which, as its source, it referred above all to the Orient and in particular to India. To which teachings of real value could Theosophy attract attention? And what misunderstandings and deformations are superimposed on them by Theosophical assumptions and vulgarisations?

Here we will limit ourselves to the examination of two notions that are pivotal to the Theosophical conception: karma and reincarnation.

In the Hindu tradition, karma means “action”. One fundamental view of this tradition is that

“from action (karma) this world was created, from it, it is sustained, from it, it will be dissolved”. In particular: “The being arises in conformity to actions (karma). Beings are the heirs of action.”

These statements are clear in themselves. They allude to a general and elementary law of causality. It is only necessary to note that here the term “action” – karma – is applied not just to action in the strictly material sense, but embraces a much vaster type. Every thought, every desire, every habit is equally karma. Besides, karma extends to orders of influence elusive to the common man; it connects effects to remote causes from much different planes; it goes beyond the limits of the visible and of a single form of existence and unlike what happens through the laws of physical causality, it does not unfold only in the dimension of time. Nevertheless, what remains in it is the character, easily seen in the laws of nature, of impersonal relationships in a necessary sequence. So, when it is about man, the law of karma does not say to do or not to do, but states simply the happenings of an effect, once a given cause has been created. It informs and does not determine. If one is free, for example, to light or not light the fire, one can not then pretend that the fire, one lighted, does not burn. In terms of karma, this notion must be extended to everything that exists in the manifest world, whether as corporeal world or as psychic, moral, intellectual and spiritual world, both in the lives of men and those of invisible forces and of the “gods”. According to the doctrine in a word, everything forms itself, transforms itself, or passes on in this way, as above as below: through pure relationships of cause and effect.

One is therefore in the order of a universal determinism, which however does not exclude freedom, but rather presupposes it as the initial cause, beyond a beginning virtually capable of producing new causes, new series of tendencies, actions, and reactions, in agreement with or opposed to what is already in act. What karma excludes are the ideas of both “chance” and “destiny” and of “providence” in the anthropomorphic sense of the principle of divine interventions or sanctions of a moral character.¹ Action and freedom therefore exhaust this vision of the world. Every being is what it makes itself. Karma only draws the consequences from created causes and the I with the current of its life only follows the ditch that it, knowingly or not, dug itself into. So guilt and merit, sin and virtue – in the Western sense – do not even exist. There are only material, psychical, or spiritual “actions” that will necessarily lead to certain material, psychical, or spiritual conditions. A priori, all lives are open, above and below. Self-determined by one of them, there is nothing to hope for or to fear, except what will proceed impersonally from the nature of this life. In the most absolute sense, each thing and each being are left to themselves.

This teaching leads to a purification of the glance. It accustoms us to consider each thing under a lucidity and a law of *reality* analogous to that which is in force in the free world of things. It liberates us from the fantasies of both fear and hope. It leads back to itself as to something simple, strong, self-supporting. And that is the premise of every higher realization.

Such is the sense of karma according to tradition, to which its notion legitimately belongs. But what became of it in Theosophy?

First of all, karma moves from the idea of freedom to a typically modern type of evolutionistic determinism. Instead of the plurality of free paths – which from the point of view of the individual is the elementary truth, every further conception belonging to the metaphysical plane² – it substitutes the unique direction of an obligatory “progress”, in which there would only be the alternative of following sooner or later.

In fact, according to the Theosophical views, the “gods” and the adepts would be beings who had gone further ahead in “evolution”; the animals, “our younger brothers”, less “advanced”. But it will be a question of time: everyone will reach the door, those who are further ahead “sacrificing themselves” for the others; and the varieties of karma will have served only as instrument to “universal progress”. As is clear, all that can only be considered as a digressing and distorted addition of Theosophy to the authentic notion of karma. It should therefore not cause surprise if this notion often passes from the plane of a transcendental realism to a more or less Philistine moralism, becoming a type of sword of Damocles suspended over the head of whoever does not conform himself to the “laws of evolution” and to the related altruistic, humanistic, egalitarian, vegetarian, feminist, etc. corollaries professed by the movement. With that, even the practical value, the liberating potentiality of this teaching, which we already mentioned, must be lost completely.

In Theosophy, karma has a specific connexion with reincarnation. Theosophy praises itself for having brought to the attention of the West this other “teaching of ancient wisdom”. In reality, given the limitation of the horizons of modern men, for whom this existence is the beginning and the end of everything, nothing comes before and after it, apart from the vague religious idea of the afterlife, which at this point no longer even constitutes a living idea – given this limitation, to arouse the sense of coming *from far-off*, of having experienced many other lives and many other deaths and of being able to still advance from world to world, beyond the end of this body, would certainly be a plus. The bad thing is that in Theosophy the whole is reduced to a monotonous series of existences of the same type, that is, terrestrial, separated by intervals of a more or less attenuated corporeity. So the limitation is precious little removed from it. Theosophy believes it can support itself on an ancient doctrine, but in reality it is based only on forms of it that are in fact exoteric and popular, and have no sense of the order of things in which they should be arranged.

In order to resolve the problem of reincarnation one should begin with clarifying that of survival, which Theosophy is not concerned with in the least, as much as its positive “spiritualistic” solution and, to tell the truth, as personal survival of every human soul, it seems certain to us. The closest idea to reincarnation as the Theosophists profess it is found perhaps in the Vedanta. But the Vedanta has a basis to it: it has the theory of the Self, of the immortal and eternal Atman, identical to the Brahman, the metaphysical principle of every thing. This theory refers to a spiritual state of man’s consciousness which is no longer to be found in the men of today, but formerly in the humanity of the Buddhist period. In Buddhism we find in fact the doctrine of the *anatma*, that is, of the denial of the essentiality of the soul and of its continuity

whatsoever. Here it is not a question – for Vedanta compared to Buddhism – of two philosophical opinions opposed to each other, but of two theories that are different only because they refer to two historically different spiritual positions. The soul (atman) that Buddhism denies is not what the Vedanta affirms. The soul of the Vedanta is none other than what Buddhism considers not as a present reality in each man but rather as a means that can only be reached exceptionally by means of asceticism. Here one could establish a relation with the esoteric sense of many traditional teachings and myths, even Western, as for example with that of the “Fall”. It is about ascertaining, at a given moment, the identifying of the personality with a conditioned psychic form and separated essentially from the body: from here, the birth of the “I”, which a modern man can relate to; the “I”, whose transience and unreality Buddhism, on the basis of a metaphysical realism, asserts reasonably and forcefully.³

Now the sense that reincarnation could have in those in which the “I” was more or less directly valid as a universal principle, superior therefore to every particular individuation (atman = Brahman, Vedanta) is not the same as the sense that the same doctrine of the most recent times can have if brought back to the ordinary human “I” and closed in on itself: in the latter, the contacts are severed, there is no longer anything that, like an unchanging silk thread, traverses and unites an indefinite series of pearls representing the singular existence. With the sense of self joined univocally to the support of a body and a brain, the outcome can be the definitive alternation of that continuity of individuated consciousness that already with birth (which extinguishes the memory of all prior experiences)⁴ has at once a first blow. In the face of this existence, the spirit as “personality” is also facing a fundamental risk. And it is no longer a question of reincarnation in the Vedantic sense: instead, it is a question of a choice of “salvation” or “perdition” that, in a certain measure, is decided on this earth. Perhaps such are the sense and the concrete historical *raison d'être*, of the teaching on the subject that are taken up in the more recent traditions, as for example the Catholic or Islamic.⁵

For the average Western man this teaching is therefore true, it is no longer reincarnation in the Vedantic sense. So if today one still wishes to speak of reincarnation, one can no longer speak of it through the soul as personality, but through other principles included in the human entity and always in a sense that excludes, furthermore, a true continuity of personal consciousness. He can tell himself that that which in the present conditions is eternal and what is transmitted from being to being is no longer the “immortal atman” (the superpersonality), but it is “life” as “desire”, in the Buddhist sense of the term.⁶ It is the deep and animal will to live, in the terms of a species of subpersonal entities that create an always new birth, that is the matrix of every mortal I, and, at the same time, the barricade to higher worlds. We are therefore brought back to things to which we noted already in the treatment of psychoanalysts [see Chapter III]. If at this point we want therefore to continue to speak of reincarnation and of karma, the vision according to reality needs to be sought in teachings of the Buddhist type, which has in view precisely the transient soul or, as an exception, the soul liberated in the state of nirvana through asceticism.

According to Buddhism, a man who has not reached awakening and spiritual illumination

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with his thoughts, words, and actions (karma) has nevertheless generated another being or “demon” (called *antarabhava* or also *vijnana*) sustained with its unsatisfied longing for life which receives fundamental tendencies from it. In general, this being survives death. The inevitable force of the inclinations which comprise it and which no will still restrains, leads it back to earth, towards a body and a life conformed to its nature; joining itself to physical and vital elements provided by parents, it constitutes the basis for the self-manifestations of other entities below the type of man which, distorted themselves by “desire”, join each other there and assimilate according to laws of affinity, coming up short of other states of existence. A new human consciousness is born. In such a manner, as an entity rather more complex than what is commonly believed, composed of diverse inheritances; an entity, which does not have a true relationship of personal continuity with the one that died. However, on the one hand, a law of cause and effect (karma) can lead back to the preceding life, the origin of what, as a specific form, became the *antarabhava*, and on the other can explain why the composite inevitably attracted the new being that is incarnated.⁷

Apart from the “spirits”, the ghosts and psychic residues which we spoke about in the critique of spiritism [see Chapter II]; apart from the *antarabhava*, the blind creature sprung out from the trunk of desire – nothing else survives death, conforming to personal continuity, in anyone who already in life has not achieved a certain degree of illumination. If instead this degree was reached – only then can one speak of a survival through the *soul*: the soul can, preserving the continuity of consciousness, also face those post *mortem* experiences, for which we have already cited a lamaic text and the totality of which could be designated with the term *purgatory*; to face them in a way to be able to achieve this or that state of existence beyond the human and subhuman world. In every case, only what belongs to the earth comes back to the earth. The “soul” does not come from other bodies, but from other worlds, that is, from other conditions of existences, and does not go into other bodies, but if it escapes the “hells” by adapting itself to its supernatural ends, it goes into others of these “worlds”. The repeated passage of the soul (not of this or that psychic complex of which the soul of mortal man is composed) under the condition of a human body represents an absolutely exceptional case. Through the soul there can therefore be *transmigration*: something in fact distinct from *reincarnation*, which can be verified only through inferior principles of the human compound, of the most collective and impersonal sort.

In its general lines, things stand thus through reincarnation in relation to present-day man. What echo is there in its doctrine that Theosophy asserts instead? Every theory or superstition – let us repeat – is always, under whatever aspect, a barometric index of the times. One can say that “reincarnation” is a correct idea if it refers uniquely to that irrational entity that, having used up a body, in its uniform and inexhaustible thirst for life passes into other bodies, never elevating itself to a higher plane.

Since in our days the beginning and the end of life for the greater number of men is used up in a similar way of being and the case of “liberation” presents itself more and more as an anomaly,

so it can be said that for humanity of the present period reincarnation in the sense of a perennial terrestrial re- arising has a certain margin of truth, apart, naturally, from what optimism adds to it in the direction of “evolution” and “progress” and apart from the supposition of everything gratuitous, of an “immortal ego”, in place of which there is instead a precisely “natural” and subpersonal entity with its creatures not connected in any true continuity and with its *appetitus innatus*, the root of every becoming in temporality and which the Orient calls *samsara*.

Also on this topic, one can point out the lack of every truly supernatural view as a characteristic of Theosophy. From the point of view of the human state of existence, there is not a true supernatural without a premise of dualism, and the “evolutionistic” conception of Theosophy flatly contrasts with that premise, asserted by every higher civilization. As in the Catholic tradition there is a very clear boundary between the temporal order and the eternal order, so in the Oriental traditions there is a clear distinction between the endless series of possibilities and of “rebirth” subordinated to becoming and desire (possibilities that include as many “divine” states as human and “infernal” states) and true liberation. That series is represented by a perpetual circle (a concept that is found again in the Hellenic tradition: *ho kyklos tes geneos*) and here every “progress” is illusory, the mode of being does not change substantially even when they reach forms of existence well beyond the common level. Liberation corresponds instead to an exceptional way, “vertical” and “supernatural”, equally far and equally close in respect to any point whatsoever of becoming and time. Instead, Theosophy abolishes this opposition: the two terms are placed on the same plane; the supreme goal is conceived as the end of an “evolutionary” development through the conditioned world and an endless series of rebirths. So where it speaks of a development, it is not the personal soul that it can have in view, but rather the natural and animal stock of “humanity”, and its “spiritualism” is, at bottom, reduced to a mystical addendum to the utopias of collective social progress with those exigencies and preoccupations that, from a higher point of view, seem to as more worthy of the name of zootechnology than of ethics. Then, as to the immortal “ego” given to everyone, it is precisely what happens by putting to sleep, by averting the reality of the alternative: *salvation or perdition* which is to be resolved in *this* existence – therefore by preventing the way of true liberation.

Such an anti-supernaturalistic spirit of Theosophy is evident not just here. Among the principles held by the movement there is that of the immanence of “One Life” in every form and in every being, and there is, at the same time, that of the duty for individual “egos”, to achieve an independent self-consciousness. With an odd application of the anti-aristocratic concepts typical of certain new morals, they even speak of a renunciation of the primordial divinity that was “possessed without merit”, in order to then re-attain it oneself ... “deservedly” through struggle battle and hard experiences of the repeated immersions in “matter”. That, in Steiner’s reformed Theosophy, corresponds to a complete plane in which “Ahriman” and “Lucifer” were duly enlisted. Thought through, this view should lead, as a logical consequence, to that “One Life” – that is, the aspect “one” of Life – it represents the “least”, the substrate, or *materia prima*, from which every being forming itself, should differentiate itself as a distinct beginning; therefore, putting value precisely on a law of difference and of articulation. Instead no: the “One Life”

becomes the goal, the perfection. In spite of the various calls back to the traditional way of super-human conquest and the occult tools gathered from the most varied sources, the idea of development in Theosophy is coloured by mystical tints and inclinations toward the degenerating direction of a simple blending of oneself with the substrate of the undifferentiated “One Life”, rejecting the “illusion of separateness” and of the “ego”.

Even here, it is about the confusions that proceed from the incomprehension of a metaphysical teaching indistinctly seen: since the purely metaphysical notion of the “Supreme Identity” has nothing to do with the notion of “One Life”. It is a serious error, moreover, equally committed by certain neo- Vedantist currents, distinct from Theosophy and directly imitating the indiscriminate teachings of other gurus of today, epigones of Hinduism, to also exchange the promiscuous *pantheistic One*, in which, to quote Hegel, everything becomes equal as in the “night where all the cows are black”, with the *metaphysical One* that is the integrating summit of a well articulated, differentiated and ordered whole, of forms, of a cosmos, in the Greek sense. What is, in Theosophy, the effective reference point, is seen, moreover, from the consequences: from the corollary of the democratic ideals of brotherhood, love, egalitarianism, universal solidarity, the levelling of the sexes and classes, in place of that virile law of hierarchy, difference, and caste that the great traditions have always known when they had the right direction for a living axis: that of the integration of man’s supernatural dignity into the suprasensible. And this is one of the most determinate points, in which, even in formerly outer circles, apart from the doctrinal confusion, the Theosophical current together with various other “spiritualistic” currents akin to it, constitute a factor that in the crisis of contemporary civilization meets the others at work on so many planes precisely in the direction of a regression into the collective and the promiscuous.

1 This conception, for that matter, is not exclusive to Oriental teaching. In classical traditions, the same notion of “providence” did not have a “moral” character, with relation to the care of a god theistically conceived, but it was thought, precisely, as a collection of conditioned and impersonal laws, as they could be the warnings, to do it or not, given by the objective science of a doctor – to use this Platonic example. (Enneads, III, iii, 5)

2 Effectively, the traditional teaching knows the idea of a higher order, which corresponds to the Far Eastern notion of the “Way of Heaven” (Tao), to the Hindu rta, to the Hellenic “cosmos”. But it is a valid idea precisely only in the metaphysical sphere and therefore must not be confused with the human notion of “design”. An allusion to the relationships between this higher order and the plane of freedom and of causality (karma) is given, if ever, by images like that of de Maistre, whereby the universe is comparable to a watch which always shows the right time, even though each of the gears moves by its own reckoning, or as in the Chinese saying, that order is the sum of all disorders. However, there is no tangible interference.

3 It is interesting to point out that the period of the birth of Buddhism (circa 600 BC), assertor of the doctrine of anatma, coincides with that of the rising of philosophic and naturalistic thought in the Orient and above all in the West (Greece): that is, with the manifestations of logical consciousness tied to the brain, which takes the place of anterior and superior forms of

consciousness that constituted the existential basis of doctrine, as in the Vedanta.

It is rather important to take account the great traditional doctrines are not mere human inventions, and their differences are not arbitrary, but relative to the adaption of the teaching to essentially different historical- spiritual conditions of things.

4 One understands therefore why Catholicism, the relation to the period in which it was formed, had to declare heretical the doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul to the body. In reality, the soul, as only “human” soul (and today one cannot speak broadly of different souls), is born with the birth of the body.

5 The worsening of the alternative: salvation-perdition, which can be observed in Protestantism in respect to Catholicism, must be explained with the character every more physical that the I has assumed in the times, still more recent, of the Reformation, contemporaneous to so-called “humanism”.

6 As was already noted, translated into moral terms, this notion corresponds in Catholicism to the theory of the inheritance of “sin” that the flesh of man would bring, from Adam, as *cupiditas* or *appetitus innatus*.

7 One can designate the irrational form with which a soul identifies itself and remains composed of various human psycho-vital functions, with the term *daemon*, in the classic sense, and to remember the Plotinian teaching that the soul “has chosen ahead its *daemon* and its life” in conformity to the nature of the tendencies that it developed in itself (Enneads, III, iv, 5-6)

Race & War

One of the most serious obstacles to a purely biological formulation of the doctrine of race is the fact that cross-breeding and contamination of the blood are not the only cause of the decline and decay of races. Races may equally degenerate and come to their end because of a process – so to speak – of inner extinction, without the participation of external factors. In purely biological terms this may correspond to those enigmatic ‘inner variations’ (idiovariations) which science has been forced to recognize are just as powerful as variations due to cross-breeding in bringing about mutations.

This will never be completely understood if the biological conception of race is not integrated with that ‘racism of the second and of the third degree’ of which we have repeatedly spoken here. It is only if race is considered as existing not only in the body, but also in the soul and in the spirit, as a deep, meta-biological force which conditions both the physical and the psychical structures in the organic totality of the human entity – it is only if this eminently traditional point of view is assumed – that the mystery of the decline of races can be fathomed in all its aspects. One can then realize that, in a way analogous to the individual abdication and inner breakdown of the individual, where the loss of all moral tension and the attitude of passive abandonment can gradually find expression in a true physical collapse, or can paralyze natural organic resources

far more efficiently than any threat to the body – so developments of the same nature can occur on the plane of those greater entities which are human races, on the greater scale in space and in time of their aggregate life spans. And what we have just pointed out about organic resources neutralized, when the inner – moral and spiritual – tension of an individual is lacking, can even allow us to consider less simplistically and less materialistically the matter of racial alterations due to mixing and contamination, as well.

This is quite similar to what happens in infections. It is known, in fact, that bacteria and microbes are not always the sole effective and unilateral causes of illness: for a disease to be acquired by contagion a certain more or less strong predisposition is necessary. The state of integrity or tonicity of the organism, in turn, conditions this predisposition, and this is greatly affected by the spiritual factor, the presence of the whole being to himself, and his state of inner intrepidity or anguish. In accordance to this analogy, we may believe that, for cross-breeding to have a really, fatally, inexorably degenerative outcome for a race, it is necessary without exception that this race already be damaged inwardly to a certain extent, and that the tension of its original will be lax as a result.

When a race has been reduced to a mere ensemble of atavistic automatisms, which have become the sole surviving vestiges of what once it was, then a collision, a lesion, a simple action from outside, is enough to make it fall, to disfigure it and to denature it. In such a case, it does not behave like an elastic body, ready to react and to resume its original shape after the collision (provided, that is, that the latter does not exceed certain limits and does not produce permanent actual damage), but, rather, it behaves like a rigid, inelastic body, which passively endures the imprint of external action.

On the basis of these considerations two practical tasks of racism can be distinguished. The first task could be said to be one of passive defense. This means sheltering the race from all external actions (crossings, unsuitable forms of life and culture, etc.) which could present the danger to it of a crisis, a mutation or a denaturation. The second task by contrast is that of active resistance, and consists in reducing to a minimum the predisposition of the race to degeneration, that is to say, the ground on which it can be exposed passively to external action. This means, essentially, 'to exalt' its inner race; to see to it that its intimate tension is never lacking; that, as counterpart of its physical integrity, within it there is something like an uncontrollable and irreducible fire, always yearning for new material to feed its blaze, in the form of new obstacles, which defy it and force it to reassert itself.

This second task is obviously more arduous than the first, because it can demand solutions which vary from individual to individual, and because external, general and material measures are of little use for it. It is a matter of overcoming the inertia of spirit, that force of gravity which is in force in human interiority no less than in the outer, physical world, and here finds expression precisely in the inclination to abandonment, to 'take it easy', to always follow the path of least resistance. But, unfortunately, for the individual as well as for the race, to overcome this danger it is necessary to have a support – for the ability to act directly, to always remain at the crest of

the wave, to maintain an inner initiative which is always renewed, without the need for renewed stimuli, can only occur as the result of an exceptional endowment, and cannot reasonably be demanded as a matter of course. As we have said, for tension which has become latent to reawaken, before it is too late and the processes of the automatization of race follow, an obstacle, a test, almost a challenge, is necessary. It is then that the crisis and the decision occur: by their way of reacting, the deeper, meta-biological powers of the race then show whether they have remained stronger than the contingencies and the destinies of the given period of history. In the case of a positive reaction, new potentialities come, from deep inside, to saturate again the racial circuit. A new ascending cycle begins for that race.

In some cases, it is even possible that precisely cross-breeding – naturally kept within very stringent limits – carries out a function of that kind. This is well-known in zootechnics. The ‘pure breed’ in some animal species is the result both of the preservation of heredity and of judicious cross-breeding. We do not share the opinion of Chamberlain,[1] who was inclined to apply this kind of thinking to the ‘superior races’ of humanity. However, it is a well proven fact that in some aristocratic families, which, with their centuries-old blood law, have been the only experimental field for racism in history hitherto, some cross-breeding have had precisely the merit of preventing extinction of the line through inner degeneration. Here – let us stress – the cross-breeding has the function of an ordeal, not a rule – an ordeal, moreover, which can also present a dangerous challenge for the blood. But danger reawakens the spirit. Before the heterogeneous element introduced by cross-breeding the homogenous nucleus is called to reaffirm itself, to assimilate to himself what is alien, to act towards it in the capacity of the ‘dominant’ towards the ‘recessive’, in terms of the laws of Mendel.[2] If the reaction is positive, the result is an awakening. The stock which seemed spent and exhausted reawakens. But if it has already fallen too much, or if the heterogeneity is excessive, the ordeal is failed and the decline is quick and definitive.

But the highest instrument of inner awakening of race is combat, and war is its highest expression. That pacifism and humanitarianism are phenomena closely linked to internationalism, democracy, cosmopolitanism and liberalism is perfectly logical – the same anti-racial instinct present in some, is reflected and confirmed in the others. The will towards sub-racial leveling inborn in internationalism finds its ally in pacifist humanitarianism, which has the function of preventing the heroic test from disrupting the game by galvanizing the surviving forces of any still not completely deracinated peoples. It is odd, however, and illustrates the errors to which a unilaterally biological formulation of the racial problem can lead, that the racial theory of ‘mis-selections’, as expressed for example by Vacher de Lapouge, partakes, to a certain extent, of the same incomprehension of the positive meaning of war for race – but here, in the face of full knowledge of the facts – as is found in internationalist democratism. To be specific, they suppose that every war turns into a progressive elimination of the best, of the exponents of the still pure race of the various peoples, facilitating thus an involution.

This is a partial view, because it only considers what is lost through the disappearance of some

individuals, not what is aroused to a much greater extent in others by the experience of war, which otherwise would never have been aroused. This becomes even more obvious if we do not consider ancient wars which were largely fought by elites while the lower strata were spared by them, but rather modern wars which engage entire armed nations and which, moreover, in their character of totality, involve not only physical but also moral and spiritual forces of combatants and non-combatants alike. The Jew Ludwig[3] expressed fury about an article published in a German military review, which brought out the possibilities of selection related even to air bombardments, in which the test of sang-froid, the immediate, lucid reaction of instinct of direction as against brutal or confused impulse, cannot but turn out in a decisive discrimination for those who have the greatest probability of escaping and surviving.

The indignation of the humanitarian Jew Ludwig, who has notwithstanding become the bellicose propagator of the 'new Holy Alliance' against Fascism, is powerless against what is correct in considerations of this sort. If the next world war is a 'total war' it will mean also a 'total test' of the surviving racial forces of the modern world. Without doubt, some will collapse, whereas others will awake and rise. Nameless catastrophes could even be the hard but necessary price of heroic peaks and new liberations of primordial forces dulled through grey centuries. But such is the fatal condition for the creation of any new world – and it is a new world that we seek for the future.

What we have said here must be considered as a mere introduction to the question of the significance which war has, in general, for race. Three fundamental points should be considered, in conclusion. First, since we proceed on the assumption of the fundamental difference of human races – a difference which, according to the doctrine of the three degrees of racism, is not restricted to corporeality but concerns also soul and spirit – it should be expected that the spiritual and physical behaviour towards the experience or test of war varies as between the various races; it will therefore be both necessary and interesting to define the sense according to which, for each specific race, the aforementioned reaction will occur.

Second, it is necessary to consider the relationship of interdependence between what a well understood racial policy can do to promote the aims of war, and, conversely, what war, in the presupposition of a right spiritual attitude, can do to promote the aims of race. We can speak, in this respect, of a sort of germ, or primary nucleus, created initially or reawakened by racial policy, which brings out racial values in the consciousness of a people; a germ or nucleus which will bear fruit by giving the war a value, while conversely the experience of war, and the instincts and currents of deep forces which emerge through such an experience, give the racial sense a right, fecund direction.

And this leads us to the third and last point. People are accustomed to speaking too generally, and too romantically, about 'heroism', 'heroic experience' and the like. When they are done with such romantic assumptions, in modern times, there seem to remain only material ones, such that men who rise up and fight are considered simply as 'human material', and the heroism of the combatants is related to victory as mere means to an end, the end itself being nothing but the

incrementation of the material and economic power and territory of a given State.

In view of the considerations which have been pointed out here, it is necessary to change these attitudes. From the 'ordeal by fire' of the primordial forces of race heroic experience, above all other experience, has been a means to an essentially spiritual and interior end. But there is more: heroic experience differentiates itself in its results not only according to the various races, but also according to the extent to which, within each race, a super-race has formed itself and come to power. The various degrees of this creative differentiation correspond to so many ways of being a hero and to so many forms of awakening through heroic experience. On the lowest plane hybrid, essentially vital, instinctive and collective forces emerge – this is somewhat similar to the awakening on a large scale of the 'primordial horde' with the solidarity, the unity of destiny and of holocaust which is peculiar to it. Gradually, this mostly naturalistic experience is purified, dignified, becomes luminous, until it reaches its highest form, which corresponds to the Aryan conception of war as 'holy war', and of victory and triumph as an apex, since its value is identical to those of holiness and initiation, and, finally, of death on the battlefield as mors triumphalis, as not rhetorical but effective overcoming of death.

Having indicated all these points in a basic but, we trust, sufficiently intelligible manner, we propose to tackle them one by one in writings which will follow the present one, which will specifically consider the varieties of heroic experience according to race and then the vision of war peculiar to the Nordic-Aryan and Ario-Roman tradition in particular.

from "The Metaphysics of War"

Race and War: The Aryan Conception of Combat

In our previous article, dealing with the capacity of war and heroic experience to bring about an awakening of deep forces connected to the substratum of the race, we have seen that, in the most general way, two distinct, and indeed opposite, types appear. In the first type, the petty bourgeois personality – tamed, conformist, pseudo-intellectual or emptily idealistic – may undergo a disintegration, involving the emergence of elementary forces and instincts, in which the individual regresses to the pre-personal stage of the 'races of nature', which exhaust themselves in a welter of conservative and affirmative instincts. In the second type, in contrast, the most 'elemental' and non-human aspects of the heroic experience become a means of transfiguration, of elevation and integration of personality in – so to speak – a transcendent way of being. This constitutes an evocation of what we have called 'the race of the spirit', that is, of the spiritual element from 'above', which, in superior stocks, acts formatively on the purely biological part, and is at the root of their 'tradition' and of their prophetic greatness – simultaneously, from the point of view of the individual, these are experiences which Antiquity, and specifically Aryan antiquity, considered no less rich in supernatural fruits than those of asceticism, holiness and even initiation. Having thus recalled our point of departure, let us specify the subjects which we intend to develop further. First of all, as we have said, we want to present a brief account which

makes it apparent that the aforementioned conception of heroism, far from being the product of a particular speculation of ours, or of an empty rhetorical projection, corresponds to a precise tradition which appears in a whole series of ancient civilizations.

In the second place, we want to develop the Aryan conception of ‘victory’, understood precisely as a ‘mystical’ value, closely connected to an inner rebirth. Finally, passing to a more concrete plane, we want to see, in general terms, of what is the behaviour of the various races in relation to this order of ideas. In the present article, we will deal thoroughly with the first point.

Broadly speaking, we find that, especially among ancient Aryan humanity, wars were thought of as images of a perennial fight between metaphysical forces: on one hand there was the Olympian and luminous principle, uranic and solar truth; on the other hand there was raw force, the ‘titanic’, telluric element, ‘barbaric’ in the classical sense, the demonic feminine principle of chaos. This view continually recurs in Greek mythology in various symbolic forms; in still more precise and radical terms it appears in the general vision of the world of the Irano-Aryan races, which considered themselves literally to be the armies of the God of Light in his struggle against the power of darkness; they persist throughout the Middle Ages, often retaining their classical features in spite of the new religion. Thus, Frederick I of Swabia, in his fight against the rebellious Commune, recalled the symbol of Hercules and the arm with which this symbolic hero of Dorian-Aryan and Achaean Aryan stocks fought as all of the ‘Olympian’ forces against the dark creatures of chaos.

This general conception, intimately experienced, could not help but be reflected in more concrete forms of life and activity, raised to the symbolic and, we could almost say, ‘ritual-like’ level. For our purposes, it is worth noting particularly the transformation of war into the ‘path of God’ and ‘greater holy war’.

We omit deliberately here any documentation peculiar to Romania because we will use this when dealing, in the next article, with the ‘mysticism of victory’. We will begin instead with the testimonies, which are themselves very well-known, relating to the Nordic-Aryan tradition. Here, Valhalla is the place of an immortality reserved above all for heroes fallen on the battlefield. The Lord of this place, Odin or Wotan, is presented to us in the Ynglingasaga as having shown to the heroes, by his own symbolic self-sacrifice on the cosmic tree Yggdrasil, the path which leads to that divine sojourn, where they live eternally, as if on a dazzling luminous peak beyond the clouds.

According to this tradition, no sacrifice or cult is more appreciated by the supreme God than that which is performed by the hero who fights and falls on the battlefield. In addition to this there is a sort of metaphysical counterpart reinforcing this view: the forces of the heroes who, having fallen and sacrificed themselves to Odin, have gone beyond the limits of human nature, and then increase the phalanx which this god needs to fight the Ragnarökkr, that is, the ‘darkening of the divine’, which has threatened the world since ancient times. In the Edda, in fact, it is said that ‘no

matter how great the number of the heroes gathered in Valhalla, they will never be too many for when the Wolf comes'.

The 'Wolf' here is the symbol of a dark and wild power which, previously, had managed to chain and subdue the stock of the 'divine heroes', or Aesir; the 'age of the Wolf' is more or less the counterpart of the 'Age of Iron' in the Classical tradition, and of the 'dark age' – Kali Yuga in the Indo-Aryan one: it alludes symbolically to an age of the unleashing of purely terrestrial and desecrated forces.

It is important to note that similar meanings remain under the Christian outer garment in the Medieval ideology of the Crusades. The liberation of the Temple and the conquest of the Holy Land had a much closer relationship than is commonly supposed with ancient traditions relating to mystical Asgard, a distant land of heroes, where there is no death, and whose inhabitants enjoy an incorruptible life and supernatural calm. 'Holy war' appeared as a very spiritual war, so much so that it could be compared literally by ancient chroniclers to 'a bathing, which is almost like the fire of purgatory before death' – a clear reference to the ascetic meaning of combat. 'It is a glory for you never to leave the battle [unless] covered with laurels. But it is an even greater glory to earn on the battlefield an immortal crown ...' said Saint Bernard to the Crusaders, addressing especially the Templars, in his *De Laude Novae Militiae*.

Thus we approach the most inward aspect of heroic experience, its ascetic value: it should not cause surprise if, to characterize it further, we now turn to the Muslim tradition, which might seem to be the opposite pole to the one just discussed. The truth is that the races which confronted each other in the Crusades were both warlike ones, which experienced in war the same supra-material meaning, even while fighting against one other. In any case, the ideas which we wish to discuss now are essentially to be considered as echoes within the Muslim tradition of an originally Persian (Aryo-Iranian) conception, assumed now by members of the Arab race.

In the Muslim tradition, in fact, we find the central nucleus of the whole order of ideas dealt with here in the theory of the twofold war, that is, of the 'lesser and greater jihad'.

The lesser war is the material war fought against a hostile people and, in particular, against an unjust one, the 'barbarians' or 'infidels', in which case it becomes the 'lesser jihad', identical to the Crusade in its outer, fanatical and simply religious sense. The 'greater jihad' is, in contrast, of the spiritual and interior order: it is the fight of man against the enemies which he bears within himself, or, more exactly, the fight of the superhuman element in man against everything which is instinctual, passionate and subject to natural forces. The condition for inner liberation is that these enemies, the 'infidels' and 'barbarians' within us, are pulled down and torn to shreds.

Now, given this background, the essence of the tradition in question lies in its conceiving the lesser war, that is, the concrete, armed one, as a path through which the 'greater jihad', the inner war, can be achieved, in perfect simultaneity. For this reason, in Islam, jihad and 'Path of God'

are often synonymous. And we read in the Qur'an: 'So let those who sell the life of this world for the Next World fight in the Way of Allah. If someone fights in the Way of Allah, whether he is killed or is victorious, We will pay him an immense reward' (4:74).

Let us come now to a pure metaphysical exposition of the doctrine in question. We find it in a text originating from the ancient Indo-Aryan races, imprinted with a sense of the heroic-spiritual reality which it would be hard to match elsewhere. It is the Bhagavad- Gita, a part of the epic poem, the Mahabharata, which to an expert eye contains precious material relating not only to the spirituality of the Aryan races which migrated to Asia, but to that of the 'Hyperborean' nucleus of these which, according to the traditional views to which our conception of race refers, must be considered as the origin of them all.

The Bhagavad-Gita contains in the shape of a dialogue the doctrine given by the incarnate divinity, Krishna, to a warrior prince, Arjuna, who had invoked him, as, overcome by humanitarian and sentimental scruples, he found himself no longer able to resolve to fight the enemy. The judgment of the God is categorical: it defines the mercy which had withheld Arjuna from fighting as 'degrading impotence' (2:4) and 'impurities...not at all befitting a man who knows the value of life. They lead not to higher planets but to infamy' (2:2). Therefore, it is not on the basis of earthly and contingent necessities but of a divine judgment that the duty of combat is confirmed here.

The promise is: '[E]ither you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly planets, or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly kingdom. Therefore, get up with determination and fight' (2:37). The inner guideline, necessary to transfigure the 'lesser war' into 'greater, holy war' in death and triumphant resurrection, and to make contact, through heroic experience, with the transcendental root of one's own being, is clearly stated by Krishna: 'Therefore, O Arjuna, surrendering all your works unto Me, with full knowledge of Me, without desires for profit, with no claims to proprietorship, and free from lethargy, fight' (3:30). The terms are just as clear about the 'purity' of heroic action, which must be wanted for itself, beyond every contingent motivation, every passion and all gross utility. The words of the text are: 'Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat – and by so doing you shall never incur sin' (2:38).

But beyond even this a true metaphysical justification of war is arrived at. We will try to express this in the most accessible way. The text works on the fundamental distinction between what in man exists in the supreme sense and, as such, is incorruptible and immutable – spirit – and the corporeal and human element, which has only an illusory existence. Having stressed the metaphysical non-reality of what one can lose or make another lose in the vicissitudes of combat, as ephemeral life and mortal body (there is nothing painful and tragic – it is said – in the fact that what is fatally destined to fall, falls), that aspect of the divine which appears as an absolute and sweeping force is recalled.

Before the greatness of this force (which flashes through Arjuna's mind in the moment of a

supernatural vision), every created, that is, conditioned, existence appears as a ‘negation’. It can therefore be said that such a force strikes as a terrible revelation wherever such ‘negation’ is actively denied; that is to say, in more concrete and intelligible terms, wherever a sudden outburst sweeps up every finite life, every limitation of the petty individual, either to destroy him, or to revive him. Moreover, the secret of the ‘becoming’, of the fundamental restlessness and perpetual change which characterizes life here below, is deduced precisely from the situation of beings, finite in themselves, which also participate in something infinite. The beings which would be described as ‘created’ by Christian terminology, are described rather, according to ancient Aryan tradition, as ‘conditioned’, subject to becoming, change and disappearance, precisely because, in them, a power burns which transcends them, which wants something infinitely vaster than all that they can ever want. Once the text in various ways has given the sense of such a vision of life it goes on to specify what fighting and heroic experience must mean for the warrior.

Values change: a higher life manifests itself through death; and destruction, for the one who overcomes it, is a liberation – it is precisely in its most frightening aspects that the heroic outburst appears as a sort of manifestation of the divine in its capacity of metaphysical force of destruction of the finite – in the jargon of some modern philosophers this would be called ‘the negation of the negation’. The warrior who smashes ‘regarding impotence’, who faces the vicissitudes of heroism ‘with your mind absorbed in the supreme spirit’, seizing upon a plan according to which both the ‘I’ and the ‘thou’, and therefore both fear for oneself and mercy for others, lose all meaning, can be said to assume actively the absolute divine force, to transfigure himself within it, and to free himself by breaking through the limitations relating to the mere human state of existence.

‘Life – like a bow; the mind – like the arrow; the target to pierce – the supreme spirit; to join mind to spirit as the shot arrow hits its target.’ – These are the evocative expressions contained in another text of the same tradition, the Markandeya Purana. Such, in short, is the metaphysical justification of war, the sacred interpretation of heroism, the transformation of the ‘lesser war’ into the ‘greater holy war’, according to the ancient Indo-Aryan tradition which gives us therefore, in the most complete and direct form, the intimate content present also in the other formulations pointed out.

In conclusion, let us mention two more points.

The first concerns the meaningful relation, in the Bhagavad-Gita, between the teaching which has just been described on the one hand and tradition and race on the other. In 4:1-3, it is said that this is the ‘solar’ wisdom received from Manu, who, as is well known, is the most ancient ‘divine’ legislator of the Aryan race. His laws, for Aryans, have the same value that the Talmud has for Hebrews: that is to say, they constitute the formative force of their way of life, the essence of their ‘race of the spirit’. Now, this primordial wisdom, which was at first transmitted through direct succession, ‘in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science as it is appears to be lost’ (4:2). It was not to a priest, but to a warrior prince, Arjuna, that

it was revealed again in the way just recounted.

To realize this wisdom by following the path of sacred heroism and absolute action can only mean, therefore, restoration, awakening, resumption of what was at the origin of tradition, which has survived for centuries in the dark depths of the race and routinized itself in the customs of successive ages. The meaning that we have already indicated, the re-galvanising effect which the fact of war in given conditions can have for the 'race of the spirit', is thus exactly confirmed.

Secondly, it can be noticed that one of the main causes of the crisis of Western civilization lies in a paralysing dilemma, constituted, on the one hand, by a weak, abstract, or conventionally devotional spirituality, rich in moralistic and humanitarian implications; and, on the other hand, by a paroxysmal development of action of all sorts, but in a materialistic and nearly barbaric sense. This situation has remote causes. Psychology teaches us that, in the subconscious, inhibition often transforms energies repressed and rejected into causes of disease and hysteria. The ancient traditions of the Aryan races were essentially characterized by the ideal of action: they were paralysed and partially suffocated by the advent of Christianity, which, in its original forms, and not without relation to elements derived from non-Aryan races, shifted the emphasis of spirituality from the domain of action to that of contemplation, devotion and monastic asceticism.

Catholicism, it is true, often tried to rebuild the smashed bridge – and here, in discussing the spirit of the Crusades, we have already seen an example of this attempt. However, the antithesis between passive spirituality and unspiritual activity has continued to weigh on the destinies of Western man and recently it has taken the form of a paroxysmal development of all sorts of action in the already stated sense of action on the material plane, which, even when it leads to realizations of unquestionable greatness, is deprived of every transcendent point of reference.

Given these conditions the advantages of the resumption of a tradition of action which is once again charged with spirit – adapted, naturally, to the times – justified not only by the immediate necessities of a particular historical situation, but by a transcendent vocation – should be clear to all. If beyond the re-integration and defence of the race of the body we must proceed to the rediscovery of values able to purify the race of the spirit of Aryan humanity from every heterogeneous element, and to lead to its steady development, we think that a new, living understanding of teachings and of ideals such as those briefly recalled here is a fitting task for us to undertake.

[1]Originally published on 20 December 1939 as 'La razza e la guerra: la concezione ariana del combattere' in *La Difesa della Razza*.

[2]Frederick I (1122-1190), also known as Barbarossa (Redbeard), was the Holy Roman Emperor. He led six invasions of Italy, and was a Crusader. According to legend, he was also one of the holders of the Spear of Destiny (the Lance which pierced the side of Christ), and will one day return to restore Germany to its former greatness.

[3]The Age of the Wolf is described in the 45th verse of the ‘Völuspá’, or Prophecy of the Seeress, the first poem of the Norse Poetic Edda. The wolf age is said to be the age of brother turning against brother, constant warfare, widespread whoredom and hardship. It is the prelude to the end of the world, although the world is destined to be recreated afterward in an even more perfect form. See The Poetic Edda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[4]The last and darkest age in the Vedic, or Hindu, cycle of ages.

[5] In Praise of the New Knighthood (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010).

[6]Latin: ‘absolute glory’.

[7]The references to the Qur'an and Bhagavad-Gita in this essay are identical to those in ‘The Greater War and the

Lesser War’ and ‘The Metaphysics of War’.

[8]From the Sanskrit, this term is used in the Advaita Vedanta tradition of Vedic, or Hindu, philosophy.

[9]The Mahabharata, along with the Ramayana, are the two great epic poems of the Hindu tradition. It describes the

Kurukshetra War, which was an epic struggle between two branches of the royal family

Soul and Race of War

In the previous articles in this series we have spoken about the varieties of heroic experience and described its possible forms from the point of view of race and spirit.

We here resume the argument and discuss in more detail the heroism and sense of the meaning of combat which we need to grasp as ideals in relation to our higher race and our higher tradition.

We have already been obliged to observe that, today, ‘heroism’ is often spoken of in a vague and unspecified sense. If by heroism what is meant is simply impulsiveness, contempt for danger, audacity and indifference towards one’s own life there is in this a sort of common denominator which can put on the same level the savage, the gangster and the crusading knight. From the material point of view this generic heroism might be sufficient for many contingencies, especially in the context of mere human herds. From a higher point of view, however, we must enquire further into the question of what heroes are, and what is the meaning which leads and determines individual heroic experience.

For this problem various elements should be borne in mind, and above all those relating to the general type of civilization, to race and, in a way, to caste as a further differentiation of race. Things can be clarified best if, as a starting point, we recall the general outline of ancient Aryan social hierarchy as it is most clearly exhibited in the Indo-Aryan civilisation, as well as in the Nordic-Romanic Medieval civilization. This hierarchy was quadripartite. At the top were the

exponents of spiritual authority – we could say, generalising, the spiritual leaders to whom the warrior nobles were subject. Then came the bourgeoisie (the ‘Third Estate’)

[2] and, in the fourth place, the caste or class of the simple workers – today we would call them the proletariat. Evidently, this was not so much a hierarchy of men as one of functions, in which, though each function had its own dignity, the functions could not help but exist normally in the relations of subordination which have just been pointed out. It is quite clear, in fact, that these relations correspond exactly to those which exist between the various faculties of every man worthy of the name: the mind directs the will, which, in its turn, dominates the functions of the organic economy – to which, finally, the purely vital forces of the body are subordinated.

This outline is very useful, if only because it allows us to distinguish general types of civilization, and to grasp the sense of their succession, or their alternation, in history. Thus we have four general types of civilization, distinguished according to whether they are guided supremely by the truths, values and ideals of the spiritual leaders, the warriors, the bourgeoisie or the slaves. Leaving aside the Middle Ages, in the quadripartite hierarchy as it appeared among the Aryans of the ancient Mediterranean world, and still more among those of the Hindu-Iranian civilization, the properly Aryan element was concentrated in the two superior castes and determined the values which dominated these cultures, while in the two other castes another blood, coming from subjugated aboriginal peoples, predominated; this fact could lead one to interesting conclusions about the racial background involved in the development of the civilizations of each of the aforementioned types.

Considerations of this nature, however, would offer little comfort to an attempt to grasp the general sense of the history of the West since it is quite clear that anyone keeping in mind the outline here explained would be led to recognise in this history, not the much spoken-of ‘evolution’, but rather an ‘involution’ – more precisely, successive falls from each of the four hierarchical degrees to the next. It is quite clear, in fact, that civilization of the pure heroic-sacral type can only be found in a more or less prehistoric period of the Aryan tradition. It was succeeded by civilizations at the top of which was the authority no longer of spiritual leaders, but of exponents of warrior nobility – and this is the age of the historical monarchies up to the period of revolutions. With the French and American revolutions the Third Estate becomes the most important, determining the cycle of bourgeois civilizations. Marxism and Bolshevism, finally, seem to lead to the final fall, the passage of power and authority to the hands of the last of the castes of ancient Aryan hierarchy.

Now, returning to our main argument, that is, to the typology of heroism, it should be noted that the transitions which have just been pointed out have not only a political significance, but they invest the whole sense of living and lead to the subordination of all values to those proper to the dominant caste or race of the spirit. Thus, for instance, in the first phase ethics has a supernatural justification and the supreme value is the conquest of immortality; in the second phase – that is,

in the civilization of warrior nobility – ethics is already ‘secular’: the ethics of fidelity, honour and loyalty. Bourgeois ethics follow this with the ideal of economic well-being, of prosperity and capitalist adventure. In the last phase the only ethics are those of materialised, collectivised and deconsecrated work as supreme value. Analogous transformations can be found in all fields – take for example architecture: as central architectonic type the temple is followed by the castle, then by the city of the commune, and finally by the rationalised hive-house of modern capitals.

Another example would be the family: from a unit of the heroic-sacral type, which it was in the first phase, it passes to the type of the ‘warrior’ family, centred in the firm authority of the father; then follows the family as bourgeois unity on an exclusively economic sentimental basis; and, in the last phase, there is the communist disintegration of the family.

Precisely the same articulations can be noticed in the types of heroic experience and in the meaning of war and combat in general. We do not need to dwell on the conception of war and heroism peculiar to the civilizations of the first type, or even to the original Aryans, because we have already referred repeatedly and at length to their traditions in previous articles. Here we will limit ourselves to saying that war and heroism in this first phase can be viewed essentially as forms of ‘asceticism’, as paths along which those same supernatural and immortality-granting fruits can be picked which are promised by initiation, or by asceticism of the religious and contemplative type. But in the second phase – in the civilization of the ‘warriors’ – the perspective has already shifted; the ‘sacred’ content of heroic experience and the concept of war almost as symbol and glimmer of an ascending and metaphysical struggle is veiled; what is above all important now is fighting and waging war on behalf of one’s race, his honour and his glory. With the advent of ‘bourgeois’ civilizations the type of the warrior gives way to that of the soldier and the national-territorial aspect which, only a little before, was not pronounced, but is emphasised: we are in the presence of the citoyen who takes up arms, of the pathos of war and heroism ‘for freedom’, that is, more or less, for the cause of the ‘immortal principle’ of ‘struggle against tyranny’ – the jargon equivalent of the political-social forms of the previous civilization of the warriors. It is with such ‘myths’ that the 1914-1918 World War has been supported, in which the Allies stated quite baldly that it represented for them the ‘crusade of democracy’, the new leap forward of the ‘great revolution’ for the cause of the freedom of the peoples against ‘imperialism’ and the residual forms of ‘Medieval obscurantism’. In the first forms of the final phase, that is, of the ‘civilization of the slaves’, the concept of war is transformed; it internationalises itself and collectivises itself, tending towards the concept of the worldwide revolution of the proletariat. It is only in the service of this revolution that war is legitimate, that dying is noble and that the hero must arise from the worker. These are the fundamental meanings to which the heroic experience can conform, leaving aside its immediate and subjective aspect of impulse and boldness which lead beyond themselves.

In talking of the penultimate phase, that is, ‘bourgeois war’, we have deliberately spoken of ‘myths’. Bourgeois nature has two main aspects: sentimentalism and economic interest. If the

ideology of 'freedom', and 'nation' democratically conceived, corresponds to the first aspect, the second has no less weight in the unconfessed motives of 'bourgeois war'. The 1914-1918 war shows clearly, in fact, that the 'noble' democratic ideology was only a cover, while the part which international finance really played is now well-known.

And today, in the new war, this appears even more clearly: the sentimental pretexts offered have proved to be more and more inconsistent, and it is obvious, on the contrary, that material and plutocratic interests, and the desire to maintain a monopoly upon the raw materials of the world, as well as upon gold, are what have set the 'tone' of the fight of the democratic Allies and have led them to take up arms and ask millions of men to sacrifice their lives.

This allows us also to remark upon the racial factor. We should not confuse what a caste or a class is when it is a subordinate part in a hierarchy which conforms to given values with what it becomes when it seizes power and subordinates everything to itself. Thus, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat of the modern world have characters very different from those which were characteristic of the corresponding classes in traditional Aryan civilizations. The desecrated and dark character of the former is as marked as were the sacred and spiritual superior values which, by means of participation, were reflected in the most humble and material forms of human activity of the latter. Every usurpation has a degradation as its fatal consequence: this process almost always presupposes the infiltration of socially and racially inferior elements. In the case of the Western bourgeoisie these elements have been supplied by Hebraism. Let us not delude ourselves: the type of the plutocrats and of the capitalists, the three kings of bourgeois and democratic civilization, is essentially a Jewish type, even when precise physical descent from the Jewish race cannot be demonstrated. With respect to America, everyone knows the considerations which led Sombart to call capitalism the quintessence of the doctrine of Moses. It is well-known that, in the final phase of the normal society of the West which was the Ghibelline Middle Ages, international trade and commerce using gold were to a large extent Jewish prerogatives, and that, even in the 'bourgeois professions' of the Third Estate of that time, wherever they remained in the hands of Aryans, before the emancipation and degeneration of the civilization of the Communes, features of great dignity and probity were maintained which can hardly be found in the modern civilization of the merchants, i.e., the bourgeois capitalist civilization. It is essentially from the Jewish element that this civilization has drawn its 'style'. And, given these facts, it is obvious that, by means of elective affinities, this civilization had to be completely opened to Hebraism, which has scaled its main positions of responsibility with ease, and has taken over control of all its powers by means of its own specialised racial qualities.

Thus, it can well be said that the current war is one of merchants and Jews, who have mobilised the armed forces and the heroic possibilities of democratic nations to defend their interests. Certainly, there are other contributory factors. But it is unquestionable that England is a typical

case of this phenomenon, which is hardly new, and, to tell the truth, exhibits a characteristic phenomenon of inversion. To be specific, in England monarchy and nobility still exist and, until yesterday, a military class with an unquestionable heritage of character, sang-froid and contempt for danger existed also. But it is not in such elements that the centre of the British Empire lies, but rather in the Jew and the Judaised Aryan. The degenerate remains of a ‘civilization of warriors’ serve a ‘civilization of merchants’, which – normally – would rather have had to serve them. Only those who have a precise sense of this can grasp the dark and confused forces at work in the race of those whom Italy fights today: and it is precisely the character of these forces which explains the decline of English fighting ability, and the impossibility of true heroism and true boldness because by now even the ‘mythic’ premises of the 1914-1918 war are lacking, as has been pointed out just above.

Let us come now to our final point, which is the clarification of the sense of our war and our heroism on the basis of the general doctrinal and historical views we have expressed. At the risk of being taken for hopeless Utopians we will never grow tired of repeating that our taking up once more of the Aryan and Roman symbols must lead to the taking up once more, also, of the spiritual and traditional conceptions which were peculiar to the original civilizations which developed under those symbols.

We have spoken of the superior Aryan conception of war and heroism as asceticism, catharsis, overcoming of the tie of the human ‘I’ and, ultimately, effective participation in immortality. Now let us emphasise that the inferior is comprised in the superior – meaning, in our case, that the experience of combat according to this superior meaning must not be understood as a sort of confused mystical impulsiveness, but as the development, integration and transfiguration of everything which can be experienced in war, or which can be asked of war, from any of the subordinate and conditioned standpoints. Proceeding from what is below to what is above, it can therefore be said that an unavoidable need for social justice in the international arena and a revolt against the hegemony of nations incarnating the ‘civilization of the merchants’ may be the immediate determinant of the war. But the one who fights the war on such grounds can find in it also the occasion to realise, simultaneously, a higher experience, that is, fighting and being a hero not so much as soldier but as warrior, as a man who fights and loves to fight not so much in the interest of material conquests as in the name of his King and of his tradition.

And beyond this stage, in a successive phase, or a higher class, this same war can become a means to achieve war in the supreme sense, as asceticism and ‘path of God’, as culmination of that general meaning of living, of which it was said: *vita est militia super terram*. All this becomes integrated and – it can be added – there is no doubt that the impulse and the ability to sacrifice are superior by far in the one who realises this supreme meaning in war, as compared one who stops at one of the subordinate meanings. And even on this mundane plane the law of the earth can meet with the law of God when the most tragic demands which can be made in the name of the greatness of a nation are fulfilled in an action whose ultimate sense is, however, the

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overcoming of the human tie, contempt for the petty existence of the ‘plains’, the tension which, in the supreme culminations of life, means choosing something which is more than life.

If this is the idea of the ‘holy war’ as simultaneously material and spiritual struggle which was peculiar to the Aryan peoples, a further, specific reference to Aryan Romancy is opportune to avoid some ‘romantic’ distortions to which that idea has been subjected in a later period in some stocks of that people, above all Nordic ones. We mean to allude to so-called ‘tragic heroism’, the love of combat for its own sake, which among Nordic peoples takes on overtones of the Titanic, the ‘Nibelungian’ [5] and the Faustian. To the extent that this is not just literature – and bad literature – it contains glints of Aryan spirituality, certainly, but they have degenerated to the level appropriate to a simple civilization of warriors since they have not been able to remain on the superior level of the origins, which is not merely heroic, but also ‘solar’ and ‘Olympian’. The Roman conception does not know this distortion. Inwardly, as outwardly, war cannot be the last word; it is rather the means to conquest of a power as calm as it is perfect and intangible.

Beyond the mysticism of war, in the higher Aryan conception as well as in the Roman one, is the mysticism of victory. The soldiers of Fabius [6] did not romantically swear to

win or to die, but rather to return as victors – as they indeed did. In the Roman ceremony of the triumph, which, as we said in another article, had a more religious than military character, the personality of the victor was in the closest relation with Jupiter, the Aryan god of cosmic order and law. The authentic idea of Pax Romana [7] had distinctly ‘Olympian’ characteristics – to realise this all one needs to do is to refer to the writers of the age of Augustus and to Virgil above all. It is not the cessation of the spiritual tension of war, but its fecund and luminous culmination – as such, it represents the overcoming of war as an end-in-itself and obscurely tragic vocation.

These are the fundamental characteristic elements of the highest Aryan conception of combat. The importance of recalling them and experiencing them again today cannot be doubted by anyone who is aware that the current conflict is not merely an almost ‘private’ affair between certain nations, but is destined, by destroying confused and violently established situations, to lead to a new general order, truly worthy of the name: spiritually Roman.

[1] Originally published on 5-20 September 1940 as ‘Anima e razza della guerra’ in *La Difesa della Razza*.

[2] In pre-revolutionary France, the estates were the various orders which defined the stratification of society. The Third Estate was comprised of the poorest elements of the populace.

[3] French: ‘citizen’.

[4] Werner Sombart (1863-1941), a German economist, and the author of *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* (London: T. F. Unwin, 1913).

[5] Nibelungen is the name of the Burgundian royal family in Germanic mythology.

[6] Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (280 BC?-203 BC) was a Roman consul who was

appointed dictator of the Roman Republic after its initial defeat during the Second Punic War, in which Rome was invaded by the Carthaginians under Hannibal's command. Fabius managed to keep the stronger Carthaginian force at bay by engaging in a protracted guerilla war against them, rather than by confronting them directly, which he knew would lead to defeat. For his victorious service, the Romans hailed Fabius as 'The Shield of Rome'.

[7] 'The Roman Peace', this was a period of the history of the Roman Empire, lasting roughly from 27 BC to 180 AD, during which the Empire prospered and fought no major wars.

[8] Augustus (63 BC-14 AD) was the first Emperor of the Roman Empire who initiated the Pax Romana.

[9] Virgil (70-19 BC) was a Roman poet who authored the Aeneid, which was the national epic of Classical Rome The Aryan Doctrine of Combat and Victory

[1] The decline of the modern West, according to the view of a famous critic of civilization,

[2] clearly possesses two salient characteristics: in the first place the pathological development of activity for its own sake; in the second place contempt for the values of knowledge and contemplation.

By knowledge this critic does not mean rationalism, intellectualism or the vain games of men of letters – nor by contemplation does he mean cutting oneself off from the world, renunciation or a misunderstood form of monastic detachment. Knowledge and contemplation represent for him, rather, the most normal and appropriate forms of participation of man in supernatural, superhuman and supra-rational reality.

Notwithstanding this clarification, his view involves what is, to us, an unacceptable presupposition. In fact, he has already tacitly implied that every act in the material domain is limiting and that the highest spiritual sphere is accessible only in ways different from those of action.

In this premise the influence of a vision of life is clearly recognisable which, in its essence, remains strange to the spirit of the Aryan race, even if it is so embedded in the thought of the Christianised West that it can even be found revived in the imperial conception of Dante.

[3] The opposition between action and contemplation, however, was unknown to the ancient Aryans. Action and contemplation were not regarded as the two terms of an opposition. They designated merely two distinct paths to the same spiritual realisation. In other words, it was thought that man could overcome the conditioning of individuality and participate in the supernatural reality by means of contemplation or, equally, by means of action.

Starting from this conception we must therefore evaluate the character of the decline of Western civilization in a different way. The tradition of action is in the nature of the Aryan-Western races. This tradition has, however, undergone a progressive deviation. The modern West has thus come to know and honour only a secularised and materialised form of action, devoid of any point of

contact with transcendence – a desecrated activity, which has necessarily degenerated fatally into fever and mania and become action for the sake of action, merely producing simple mechanical effects conditioned by time. In the modern world ascetic and authentically contemplative values cannot be drawn into correspondence with such degenerate action either, but only a confused culture and a lifeless and conventional faith. This is the point of reference for our analysis of the situation.

If the watchword for any current movement of renewal is ‘return to the origins’ then recovering awareness of the ancient Aryan conception of action must be considered an essential task. This conception must operate with transformative effectiveness, evoking vital forces in the new man, aware of his race. Today, we ourselves propose to attempt a general survey of the speculative universe of the ancient Aryans in order to provide new evidence for some fundamental elements of our common tradition, with particular relevance to the meaning of combat, war and victory.

For the ancient Aryan war had the general meaning of a perpetual fight between metaphysical powers. On the one hand there was the Olympian principle of light, the uranic and solar reality; on the other hand, brute violence, the titanic-telluric, barbaric element in the classical sense, the feminine-demonic substance. The motif of this metaphysical fight resurfaces continually through countless forms of myth in all traditions of Aryan origin. Any fight, in the material sense, was experienced with greater or lesser awareness as an episode in that antithesis. But the Aryan race considered itself to be the army of the Olympian principle: accordingly, it is necessary to restore this conception among Aryans, as being the justification, or the highest consecration, of any hegemonic aspiration, but also of the very idea of empire, whose anti-secular character is basically very obvious.

To the traditionally based world view, all apparent realities are symbolic. This is therefore true of war as well, as is seen from the subjective and interior point of view. War and the Path of God are thus merged into a single entity.

The significant testimonies found within the Nordic-German traditions regarding this are well-known. It is necessary to note, however, that these traditions, in the terms in which they have reached us, have become fragmented and jumbled up, or constitute materialistic residues of higher, primordial Aryan traditions, often decayed to the level of popular superstitions. This consideration does not prevent us from establishing some essential motifs.

First of all, as is well-known, Valhalla is the centre of celestial immortality, reserved mainly for heroes fallen on the battlefield. The lord of this place, Odin-Wotan, is presented to us in the Ynglingasaga as having shown to the heroes the path which leads to the place of the gods, where immortal life flourishes. According to this tradition no sacrifice or cult is more appreciated by the supreme god, and none produces richer fruits, than that sacrifice which one offers as one falls fighting on the battlefield. In addition to this, behind the confused popular representation of the Wildes Heer [4] this meaning is hidden: through the warriors who, falling, offer a sacrifice to Odin the power is increased which this god needs for the ultimate battle against the Ragna-rökkr, that is, the ‘darkening of the divine’, which has threatened the world since ancient times. This

illustrates clearly the Aryan motif of the metaphysical struggle. In the Edda, it is said that ‘no matter how great the number of the heroes gathered in Valhalla they will never be too many for when the Wolf comes’. The ‘Wolf’ here is the symbol of dark and wild powers which the world of the Aesir had managed to chain and subdue.

The Aryo-Iranian conception of Mithra, the ‘sleepless warrior’, who at the head of the Fravashi of his faithful wages battle against the enemies of the Aryan God of Light is completely analogous. We will soon deal with the Fravashi and their correspondence with the Valkyries of the Nordic tradition. For now, we would like to explain the general meaning of the ‘holy war’ by means of other, concordant testimonies.

It should not cause surprise if we refer in the first place to the Muslim tradition. Here, the Muslim tradition serves as transmitter of the Aryo-Iranian tradition. The idea of ‘holy war’ – at least as far as the elements that we are considering are concerned – reached the Arabian tribes via the world of Persian speculation. It was, therefore, a late rebirth of a primordial Aryan heritage, and seen from this perspective we can certainly adopt it.

Having said that, in the tradition in question two ‘holy wars’ are distinguished: the ‘greater holy war’ and the ‘lesser holy war’. The distinction is based on a saying of the Prophet, who, when he got back from a military expedition, said, ‘I return now from the lesser to the greater war’.

[5] In this respect the greater holy war belongs to the spiritual order. The lesser holy war, in contrast, is the physical struggle, the material war, fought in the outer world. The greater holy war is the struggle of man against the enemies he bears in himself. More precisely, it is the fight of the supernatural element, innate in man, against everything which is instinctual, passionate, chaotic and subject to the forces of nature. This is also the idea that reveals itself in a text of the ancient Aryan warrior wisdom, the Bhagavad-Gita: ‘Thus knowing oneself to be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, O mighty-armed Arjuna, one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence and thus – by spiritual strength – conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust’ (3:43).

The necessary condition for the inner work of liberation is that this enemy is destroyed once and for all. In the context of a heroic tradition the lesser holy war – that is, external combat – serves only as something by means of which the greater holy war is achieved.

For this reason ‘holy war’ and ‘Path of God’ are often treated as synonymous in the texts.

Thus we read in the Qur’ān: ‘So let those who sell the life of this world for the Next World fight in the Way of Allah. If someone fights in the Way of Allah, whether he is killed or is victorious, We will pay him an immense reward’ (4:74). And further: ‘As for those who fight in the Way of Allah, He will not let their actions go astray. He will guide them and better their condition and He will admit them into the Garden which He has made known to them’ (47:4-6).

This is an allusion to physical death in war, which corresponds perfectly to the so called mors triumphalis – ‘triumphant death’ – of the Classical traditions. However, the same doctrine can

also be interpreted in a symbolic sense. The one who, in the ‘lesser holy war’, has been able to live a ‘greater holy war’ has created within himself a force which puts him in a position to overcome the crisis of death. Even without getting killed physically, through the asceticism of action and combat, one can experience death, one can win inwardly and realise ‘more-than-life’. In the esoteric respect, as a matter of fact, ‘paradise’, ‘the celestial realm’ and analogous expressions are nothing but symbolic representations – concocted for the people – of transcendent states of consciousness on a higher plane than life and death.

These considerations should allow us to discern the same contents and meanings, under the outer garment of Christianity, which the Nordic-Western heroic tradition was forced to wear during the Crusades in order to be able to manifest itself in the external world. In the ideology of the Crusade the liberation of the Temple and the conquest of the ‘Holy Land’ had points of contact – much more numerous than one is generally inclined to believe – with the Nordic-Aryan tradition, which refers to the mystical Asgard, the remote land of the Aesir and heroes, where death does not reign and the inhabitants enjoy immortal life and supernatural peace. Holy war appeared as an integrally spiritual war, so much so that it could be compared literally by preachers to ‘a bathing which is almost like the fire of purgatory, but before death’.

Saint Bernard declared to the Templars, ‘It is a glory for you never to leave the battle [unless] covered with laurels. But it is an even greater glory to earn on the battlefield an immortal crown ...’ The ‘absolute glory’ – attributed to the Lord who is above, in the skies – in excelsis Deo [6] – is ordained also for the Crusader. Against this background Jerusalem, the coveted goal of the ‘lesser holy war’, could be seen in the twofold aspect of terrestrial city and celestial city and the Crusade proved to be the prelude to a true fulfilment of immortality.

The oscillating military vicissitudes of the Crusades provoked bafflement, initial confusion and even a wavering of faith. But later their sole effect was to purify the idea of holy war from every residue of materiality. The ill-fated outcome of a Crusade came to be compared to virtue persecuted by misfortune, a virtue whose value can be judged and rewarded only in the light of a supra-terrestrial life. Beyond victory or defeat the judgement of value focused on the spiritual dimension of action. Thus, the holy war was worthwhile for its own sake, irrespective of its visible results, as a means to reach a supra personal realisation through the active sacrifice of the human element.

The same teaching appears, elevated to a metaphysical plane of expression, in a famous Hindu-Aryan text – the Bhagavad-Gita. The humanitarian compassion and the emotions which hold the warrior Arjuna back from fighting against the enemy are characterised by the god as ‘impurities...not at all befitting a man who knows the value of life. They lead not to higher planets but to infamy’ (2:2).

Instead the god promises the following: ‘[E]ither you will be killed on the battlefield and attain the heavenly planets, or you will conquer and enjoy the earthly kingdom.

Therefore, get up with determination and fight' (2:37).

The inner disposition to transmute the lesser holy war into the greater holy war is clearly described in the following terms: 'Thus knowing oneself to be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, O mighty-armed Arjuna, one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence and thus – by spiritual strength – conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust' (3:43).

Equally clear expressions assert the purity of this action: it must be wanted for itself, beyond every material aim, beyond every passion and every human impulse: 'Do thou fight for the sake of fighting, without considering happiness or distress, loss or gain, victory or defeat – and by so doing you shall never incur sin' (2:38).

As a further metaphysical foundation the god enlightens his listener on the difference between absolute spirit, which is indestructible, and the corporeal and human elements, which possess only illusory existence. On the one hand Arjuna becomes aware of the metaphysical unreality of what one can lose or cause others to lose, i.e., the ephemeral life and the mortal body. On the other hand Arjuna is led to experience the manifestation of the divine as a power which sweeps the one who experiences it away into irresistible absoluteness. Compared to this force any conditioned form of existence appears as a mere negation. When this negation is itself continuously and actively negated, that is, when every limited form of existence is overwhelmed or destroyed in combat, this force becomes terrifyingly evident. It is in these terms that the energy suitable to provoke the heroic transformation of the individual can be properly defined. To the extent that he is able to act in the purity and absoluteness which we have indicated the warrior breaks the chains of the human, evokes the divine as metaphysical force of destruction of the finite, and attracts this force effectively into himself, finding in it his illumination and liberation.

The evocative watchword of another text, belonging to the same tradition, is appropriate here: 'Life – like a bow; the mind – like the arrow; the target to pierce – the supreme spirit; to join mind to spirit as the shot arrow hits its target.' It is highly significant that the Bhagavad-Gita presents these teachings, which explain how the higher form of the metaphysical realisation of combat and heroism should be understood as referring to a primordial Aryan heritage of a solar nature. These teachings were in fact given by 'The Sun' to the primordial legislator of the Aryans, Manu, and subsequently maintained by a sacred dynasty of kings. In the course of centuries they came to be lost and were therefore newly revealed by the divinity, not to a priest, but to a representative of the warrior nobility, Arjuna.

What we have discussed so far allows us to understand also the intimate content of another group of classical and Nordic traditions. We must start with a simple observation: in these traditions, certain specific symbolic images appear exceptionally often: that of the soul as demon, double, genius and the like; those of the Dionysian [7] entities and the goddess of death; and, finally, that of a goddess of victory, who often appears also as goddess of battle.

To understand these we should first clarify the meaning of the image of the soul as demon, genius or double. The man of Classical Antiquity symbolised in the demon or double a deep force, which is the life of life, so to speak, insofar as it rules over all the corporeal and animic events which ordinary consciousness does not reach, but which, however, are determinative of the contingent existence and destiny of the individual. A close relationship was believed to exist between this entity and the mystical powers of race and blood. The demon seems in many aspects to be similar to the lares, the mystical entities of a stock or of a progeny, of which Macrobius, [8]for example, asserts: 'The gods are those who keep us alive – they feed our body and guide our soul.' It can be said that there is a relationship between the demon and ordinary consciousness analogous to that which exists between the individuating principle and the individuated principle. The former is, according to the teaching of the ancients, a supra-individual force, superior, therefore, to birth and death. The latter, i.e., individuated consciousness, conditioned by the body and the outer world, is destined as a rule to dissolution or to an ephemeral and indistinct survival. In the Nordic tradition, the image of the Valkyrie has more or less the same meaning as that of the demon in Classical Antiquity. In many texts the image of the Valkyrie merges with that of the fylgia, that is, a spiritual entity at work in man, to whose power the destiny of man is subject. And as kynfylgja the Valkyrie is – like the lares of ancient Rome – the mystical power of the blood. The same thing applies to the Fravashi of the Aryo-Iranian tradition. The Fravashi, a famous Orientalist explains, 'is the intimate power of any human being, it is what keeps him alive and sees to it that he is born and exists'.

At the same time the Fravashi are, like Roman lares, related to the primordial powers of a stock, and are, like the Valkyries, terrifying goddesses of war, dispensers of fortune and victory.

This is the first connection we wish to examine. This mysterious power, which is the deep soul of the race and the transcendent factor at work in the individual, what can it have in common with the goddess of war? To understand this point correctly, it is necessary to remember that ancient Indo-Europeans had, so to speak, an aristocratic and differentiated conception of immortality. Not all escape the dissolution of the 'I' into that lemuric residuum of which Hades and Niflheim[9] were ancient symbolic representations.

Immortality is the privilege of the few, and, according to the Aryan conception, specifically the privilege of heroes. Continuing to live – not as a shadow, but as a demigod is reserved to those which a special spiritual action has elevated from the one nature to the other. Here, we unfortunately cannot prove in extenso the following affirmation: from the operative standpoint this spiritual action consisted of the transformation of the individual 'I' from the form of ordinary human consciousness, which remains circumscribed and individuated, into a deep, supra-individual and individuating power, which exists beyond birth and death, a power to which we have said the notion of the 'demon' corresponds.

[10] The demon is, however, beyond all the finite forms in which it manifests itself, and this not only because it represents the primordial power of an entire stock, but also with respect to intensity. Consequently, the abrupt passage from ordinary consciousness to the power symbolised

by the demon causes a destructive crisis, a sort of rupture, as a result of the tension of a potential too strong for the human circuit. Let us suppose therefore the case in which, in completely exceptional conditions, the demon can itself, so to speak, burst out in the individual, making him feel its destroying transcendence: in this case a sort of living and active experience of death would be aroused. The second connection, that is, the reason why in the mythical representations of Antiquity the image of the double or demon has been able to merge with that of the divinity of death, therefore becomes clear. In the Nordic tradition the warrior sees his Valkyrie as he dies or he experiences a mortal danger.

Let us go further. In religious asceticism mortification, the renunciation of the 'I' and the impulse to give oneself up to God, are the preferred means by which one attempts to cause the aforementioned crisis and to overcome it effectively. Expressions like 'mystical death' or 'dark night of the soul',

[11] etc., which indicate this condition, are well-known. As opposed to this, in the context of a heroic tradition the active impulse, the Dionysian unleashing of the element of action, is the preferred means to the same end. At the lowest degree of the corresponding phenomenology we observe, for example, dance when employed as a sacred technique to evoke and employ, through the ecstasy of the soul, forces which reside in its depths. Another life arises within the life of the individual when freed by the Dionysian rhythm, almost like the emergence of his own abysmal root. The Wildes Heer, the Furies,[12] the Erynnies and other analogous spiritual natures are symbolic representations of this force. They therefore correspond to a manifestation of the demon in its terrifying and active transcendence. Sacred games represent a higher level of this process. A still higher level is that of war. In this way we are led back again to the ancient Aryan conception of combat and warrior asceticism.

The possibility of some such supra-normal experience was acknowledged to reside at the peak of danger and of heroic combat. The Latin word *ludere* (to play, to fight) already seems to contain the idea of resolving (Bruckmann)

[13] This is one of the many references to the property, innate to combat, of freeing one from individual limitation and of bringing to emergence free forces which are latent in the depths. The third analogy draws its origin and foundation from this: the demon, the lares, the individuating 'I', etc., are identical not only to the Furies, the Erynnies, and other unleashed Dionysian natures, which themselves have numerous features in common with the goddess of death; they correspond also to the virgins who guide the attacker in battle, the Valkyries and the Fravashi. The Fravashi, for example, are referred to in the texts as "the terrifying, the omnipotent", "those who storm and grant victory to the one who invokes them" – or, to say it better, to the one who evokes them within himself.

It is a short step from here to our final analogy. The same warlike entities assume finally in Aryan traditions the features of goddesses of victory, a metamorphosis which marks precisely the

happy fulfilment of the inner experiences in question. Just like the demon or double they signify a deep and supra-individual power, which remains in its latent state during ordinary consciousness; just as the Furies and the Erynnies reflect a special manifestation of demonic eruptions and outbursts – and the goddesses of death, Valkyries, fravashi, etc. refer to the same situations, insofar as these are made possible by means of heroic combat – so the goddess of victory is the expression of the triumph of the ‘I’ over this power. It marks the successful impulsion towards a condition situated beyond the danger innate in the ecstasy and the sub-personal forms of destruction, a danger always waiting in ambush behind the frenetic moment of Dionysian action and of heroic action itself. What finds expression in this representation of mythical consciousness is therefore the impulse towards a spiritual, truly supra-personal state, which makes free, immortal, inwardly indestructible – which, as it is said, “makes, of the two, one” (the two elements of the human essence).

Let us come now to the overall meaning of these ancient heroic traditions, that is, to the mystical conception of victory. The fundamental idea was that there was an effective correspondence between the physical and the metaphysical, between the visible and the invisible; a correspondence whereby the works of the spirit manifested supra-individual features and were expressed through real operations and facts. From this presupposition, a spiritual realisation was pre-ordained as the secret spirit of certain warlike enterprises of which concrete victory would be the crown. Accordingly, the material, military dimension of victory was regarded as the correlative of a spiritual fact, which brought the victory about in accordance with the necessary relationship between the interior and exterior worlds. Victory, then, appears as the outward and visible sign of a consecration and a mystical rebirth achieved at the same point. The Furies and death, whom the warrior has faced materially on the battlefield, contested spiritually within him in the form of a threatening eruption of the primordial forces of his being. As he triumphs over these, victory is his.

It thus becomes clear why, in the traditional world, victory assumed a sacred meaning.

Thus, the chieftain, acclaimed on the battlefield, provided a living experience of the presence of a mystical power which transfigured him. The deep meaning of the other worldly character bursting out in the glory and the ‘divinity’ of the victor – the fact that, in ancient Rome, the celebration of the triumph assumed features much more sacred than military – becomes therefore comprehensible. The recurrent symbolism in ancient Aryan traditions of victories, Valkyries and analogous entities which guide the soul of the warrior to the ‘sky’, is revealed to us in a completely different light now, as does the myth of the victorious hero, such as the Dorian Hercules, who obtains the crown which makes him share in Olympian immortality from Nike, the ‘goddess of victory’. The extent to which the perspective which wants to see only ‘poetry’, rhetoric and fables in all this is distorted and superficial becomes clear now.

Mystical theology teaches that the beatifying spiritual vision is achieved in glory, and Christian

iconography puts the aureole of glory around the heads of saints and of martyrs.

All this indicates a heritage, albeit faded, of our more elevated heroic tradition. The Aryo Iranian tradition already knew, in fact, glory – hvareno – understood as celestial fire, a

glory which comes down on kings and chiefs, renders them immortal and in victory testifies for them. And, in classical Antiquity, the radiating royal crown symbolised glory precisely as solar and celestial fire. In the Aryan world light, solar splendour, glory, victory, divine royalty are images and notions which appear in the tightest conjunction, not in the sense of abstractions and inventions of man, but rather with the meaning of latent potentialities and absolutely real actualised capacities. In such context the mystical doctrine of fight and victory represents for us a luminous apex of our common tradition of action.

Today this tradition speaks to us in a way which is still comprehensible – provided, of course, that we renounce its outer and contingent modalities of manifestation. If we want to go beyond an exhausted, battered spirituality, built upon speculative abstractions and pietistic feelings, and at the same time to go beyond the materialistic degeneration of action, what better points of reference can be found today than the aforementioned ideals of ancient Aryan man?

But there is more. In the West spiritual and material tensions have become entangled to such a degree in recent years that they can only be resolved through combat. With the present war an age goes towards its end and forces are gaining ground which can no longer be dominated by abstract ideas, universalistic principles or myths conceived as mere irrationalities, and which do not in themselves provide the basis for a new civilisation. A far deeper and far more essential form of action is now necessary so that, beyond the ruins of a subverted and condemned world, a new age breaks through for Europe.

In this perspective a lot will depend on the way in which the individual of today is able to give shape to the living experience of combat: that is, on whether he is in a position to assume heroism and sacrifice as catharsis, and as a means of liberation and of inner awakening. This work of our combatants – inner, invisible, far from gestures and grandiloquencies – will have a decisive character not only for the conclusion, victorious and definitive, of the events of this stormy period, but also for the configuration and the attribution of the sense of the Order which will rise from victory. Combat is necessary to awaken and temper that force which, beyond onslaughts, blood and danger, will favour a new creation with a new splendour and a powerful peace.

For this reason it is on the battlefield that pure action must be learned again today: action not only in the sense of virile asceticism, but also in the sense of purification and of path towards higher forms of life, forms valid in themselves and for themselves – this means precisely a return to ancient Aryo-Western tradition. From remote times, this evocative watchword still echoes down to us: ‘Life – like a bow; the mind – like the arrow; the target to pierce – the supreme spirit; to join mind to spirit as the shot arrow hits its target.’

The one who still experiences combat today, in the sense of this acknowledgement of this profession, will remain standing while others will collapse – and his will be an invincible force.

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This new man will overcome within himself any drama, any dusk, any chaos, forming, with the advent of the new times, the principle of a new development.

According to the ancient Aryan tradition such heroism of the best men can assume a real evocative function, that is, it can re-establish the contact, lost for centuries, between world and supra-world. Then the meaning of combat will be, not horrible slaughter, nor desolate destiny conditioned by the will-to-power alone, but a test of the good reason and divine vocation of a stock. Then the meaning of peace will not be renewed drowning in colourless bourgeois everyday life, nor the lack of the spiritual tension found in combat, but the fullness of the tension itself.

‘The blood of Heroes is closer to the Lord than the ink of scholars and the prayers of the pious.’

The traditional conception is also based on the presupposition that, far more than individuals, the mystical primordial powers of the race are at work in ‘holy war’. These powers of the origins are those which create worldwide empires and bring to men ‘victorious peace’.

The point to which we have often drawn the attention of our readers is that examination of the topic of ‘inner race’ is worthwhile, however incomplete it may remain at this stage, because of the fact that, rather than just noting the occurrence or non-occurrence of struggle and death among a people, it is necessary to consider their distinct ‘style’ and attitude regarding these phenomena and the distinct meanings which they may give to struggle and heroic sacrifice at any particular time. In fact, at least in general terms, we can speak of a scale along which individual nations may be placed according to how the value of human life is measured by them.

The vicissitudes of this war have exposed contrasts in this respect, which we would like to discuss briefly here. We shall limit ourselves essentially to the extreme cases, represented, respectively, by Russia and Japan.

Bolshevik Sub-Personhood

It is now well known that Soviet Russia’s conduct of war does not attach the slightest importance to human life or to humanity as such. For them the combatants are nothing but ‘human material’ in the most brutal sense of this sinister expression – a sense which, unfortunately, has now become widespread in a certain sort of military literature – a material to which no particular attention need be given and which, therefore, they need not hesitate to sacrifice in the most pitiless way, providing they have an adequate supply of it to hand. In general, as recent events have shown, the Russian can always face death readily because of a sort of innate, dark fatalism, and human life has been cheap for a long time in Russia. However, in the current use of the Russian soldier as the rawest ‘human fodder’ we see also a logical consequence of Bolshevik thought, which has the most radical contempt for all values derived from the idea of personhood and intends to free the individual from this idea, which it regards as superstition, and from the ‘bourgeois prejudice’ of the ‘I’ and the ‘mine’, in order to reduce him to the status of a mechanical member of a collective whole, which is the only thing which is regarded as

important.

From these facts the possibility of a form of sacrifice and heroism which we would call ‘telluric’ and sub-personal, under the sign of the collective, omnipotent and faceless man, becomes apparent. The death of the bolshevised man on the battlefield represents, thus, the logical culmination of the process of depersonalisation, and of the destruction of every qualitative and personal value, which underlay the Bolshevik ideal of ‘civilisation’ all along. Here, what Erich Maria Remarque had tendentiously proposed in a book which became notorious as the comprehensive meaning of war can be accurately grasped: the tragic irrelevance of the individual in a situation where pure instinctuality, unleashed elemental forces and sub-personal impulses gain ascendancy over all conceivable values and ideals. Indeed, the tragic nature of this is not even felt, precisely because the sense of personhood has already vanished every higher horizon is precluded and collectivisation, even of the spiritual realm, has already struck deep roots in a new generation of fanatics, brought up on the words of Lenin and Stalin. We see here one specific form, albeit one almost incomprehensible to our European mentality, of readiness for death and self sacrifice, which affords perhaps even a sinister joy in the destruction both of oneself and of others.

The Japanese Mysticism of Combat

Recent episodes of the Japanese war have made known to us a ‘style’ of dying which, from this point of view, seems to have affinities with that of Bolshevik man in that it appears to testify to the same contempt for the value of the individual and of personhood in general. Specifically, we have heard of Japanese airmen who, their planes loaded with bombs, hurl themselves deliberately upon their targets, and of soldiers who place mines and are doomed to die in their action, and it seems that a formal body of these ‘volunteers for death’ has been in existence in Japan for a long time. Once again, there is something in this which is hardly comprehensible to the Western mind. However, if we try to understand the most intimate aspects of this extreme form of heroism we find values which present a perfect antithesis to those of the lightless ‘telluric heroism’ of Bolshevik man.

The premises here are, in fact, of a rigorously religious or, to put it better, an ascetic and mystical character. We do not mean this in the most obvious and external sense – that is, as referring to the fact that in Japan the religious idea and the Imperial idea are one and the same thing, so that service to the Emperor is regarded as a form of divine service, and self sacrifice for the Tenno [2] and the state has the same value as the sacrifice of a missionary or martyr – but in an absolutely active and combative sense. These are certainly aspects of the Japanese politico-religious idea: however, a more intimate explanation of the new phenomena must be looked for, on a higher plane than this, in the vision of the world and of life proper to Buddhism and above all to the Zen school, which has been rightly defined as the ‘religion of the samurai’, that is, of the Japanese warrior caste.

This ‘vision of the world and of life’ really strives to lift the possessor’s sense of his own true

identity to a transcendental plane, leaving to the individual and his earthly life a merely relative meaning and reality.

The first notable aspect of this is the feeling of ‘coming from afar’ – that is, that earthly life is only an episode, its beginning and ending are not themselves to be found here, it has remote causes, it is held in tension by a force which will express itself subsequently in other destinies, until supreme liberation. The second notable aspect, related to the first, is that the reality of the ‘I’ in simple human terms is denied. The term ‘person’ refers itself back to the meaning that it originally had in Latin, namely the mask of an actor, that is, a given way of appearing, a manifestation. Behind this, according to Zen, that is, the religion of the samurai, there is something incomprehensible and uncontrollable, infinite in itself and capable of infinite forms, so that it is called symbolically sunya, meaning ‘empty’, as against everything which is materially substantial and bound to specific form.

We see here the outline of the basis for a heroism which can be called ‘supra-personal’ whereas the Bolshevik one was, contrarily, ‘sub-personal’. One can take hold of one’s own life and cast it away at its most intense moment out of super-abundance in the certainty of an eternal existence and of the indestructibility of what, never having had a beginning, cannot have an end. What may seem extreme to a certain Western mentality becomes natural, clear and obvious here. One cannot even speak here of tragedy – but for the opposite reason to that which applied in the case of Bolshevism: one cannot speak of tragedy because of the lived sense of the irrelevance of the individual in the light of the possession of a meaning and a force which, in life, goes beyond life. It is a heroism which we could almost call ‘Olympian’.

And here, incidentally, we may remark on the dilettante triviality of one author who in a certain article has tried to demonstrate in four lines the pernicious character which such views, opposed to those which hold that earthly existence is unique and irrevocable, must have for the idea of the state and service to the state. Japan offers the most categorical refutation of such wild imaginings and the vigour with which our ally Japan wages her heroic and victorious battle demonstrates, on the contrary, the enormous warrior-like and spiritual potential which can proceed from the lived feeling of transcendence and supra personhood to which we have referred.

Roman Devotio

Here it is appropriate to emphasise that, if the acknowledgment of the value of personhood is peculiar to the modern West, what is also peculiar to it is an almost superstitious emphasis on the importance of upbringing, which under recent conditions of democratisation has given rise to the famous concept of ‘human rights’ and to a series of socialistic, democratic and humanistic superstitions. Along with this clearly less than positive aspect there has been equal emphasis on the ‘tragic’, not to say ‘Promethean’, conception, which again represents a fall in level.

In opposition to all this we must recall the ‘Olympian’ ideals of our most ancient and purest

traditions; we will then be able to conceive as equally ours an aristocratic heroism, free from passion, proper to beings whose life-centre is truly on a higher plane from which they are able to hurl themselves, beyond any tragedy, beyond any tie and any anguish, as irresistible forces.

Here, a little historical reminiscence is called for. Although this is not widely known, our ancient Roman traditions contained motifs concerning the disinterested, heroic offering of one's own person in the name of the state for the purpose of victory analogous to those which we have seen in the Japanese mysticism of combat. We are alluding to the so-called *devotio*. Its presuppositions are equally sacred. What acts in it is the general belief of the traditional man that invisible forces are at work behind the visible ones and that man, in his turn, can influence them.

According to the ancient Roman ritual of *devotio*, as we understand it, a warrior, and above all a chieftain, can facilitate victory by means of a mysterious unleashing of forces determined by the deliberate sacrifice of his own person, combined with the will not to come out of the fray alive. Let us recall the execution of this ritual by Consul Decius in the war against the Latins (340 BC),

[3] and also the repetition of it – exalted by Cicero

[4] (Fin.II, 19, 61; Tusc. I, 37, 39) – by two other members of the same family. This ritual had its own precise ceremony, testifying to the perfect knowledge and lucidity of this heroic sacrificial offer. In proper hierarchical order, first the Olympian divinities of the Roman state, Janus, Jupiter, Quirinus, and then, immediately following this, the god of war, Pater Mars, and then, finally, certain indigenous gods, were invoked: 'gods – it is said – which confer power to heroes over their enemies'; by the virtue of the sacrifice which these ancient Romans proposed to perform the gods were called upon to 'grant strength and victory to the Roman people, the Quirites, and effect the enemies of the Roman people, the Quirites, with terror, dismay, and death' (cf. Livy, 8:9).

[5] Proposed by the pontifex,

[6] the words of this formula were uttered by the warrior, arrayed in the *praetexta*, his foot upon a javelin. After that he plunged into the fray, to die. Incidentally, here the transformation of the sense of the word *devotio* must be noticed. While it applied originally to this order of ideas, that is, to a heroic, sacrificial and evocative action, in the later Empire it came to mean simply the fidelity of the citizen and his scrupulousness in making his payments to the state treasury (*devotio rei annonariae*). As Bouché-Leclercq [7] puts it, in the end, 'after Caesar was replaced by the Christian God, *devotio* means simply religiosity, the faith ready for all sacrifices, and then, in a further degeneration of the expression, devotion in the common sense of the word, that is, constant concern for salvation, affirmed in a meticulous and tremulous practice of the cult'. Leaving this aside, in the ancient Roman *devotio* we find, as we have shown, very precise signs of a mysticism aware of heroism and of sacrifice, binding the feeling of a supernatural and superhuman reality tightly to the will to struggle with dedication in the name of one's own chieftain, one's own state and one's own race. There are plenty of testimonies to an 'Olympian' feeling of combat and victory peculiar to our ancient traditions. We have discussed this

extensively elsewhere.

Let us only recall here that in the ceremony of the triumph, the victorious dux [8] displayed in Rome the insignia of the Olympian god to indicate the real force within him which had brought about his victory; let us recall also that beyond the mortal Caesar, Romanity worshipped Caesar as ‘perennial victor’, that is, as a sort of supra-personal force of Roman destiny.

Thus, if succeeding times have made other views prevail, the most ancient traditions still show us that the ideal of an Olympian ‘heroism’ has been our ideal as well, and that our people have also experienced the absolute offering, the consummation of their whole existence in a force hurled against the enemy in a gesture which justifies the most complete evocation of abysmal forces; and which brings about, finally, a victory which transforms the victors and enables their participation in supra-personal and ‘fatal’ powers.

And so, in our heritage, points of reference are indicated which stand in radical opposition to the sub-personal and collectivist heroism we discussed above, and not only to that, but to every tragic and irrational vision which ignores what is stronger than fire and iron, and stronger than life and death.

[1]Originally published on 19 April 1942 as ‘Volti dell’eroismo’ in ‘Diorama mensile’, Il Regime Fascista.

[2]The Japanese term for the Emperor, meaning ‘heavenly sovereign’.

[3]Publius Decius Mus was a consul of the Roman Republic during the Latin War. He performed the *devotio* prior to the Battle of Vesuvius after an oracle predicted that he would not survive it. When the Roman attack began to falter, he called upon the gods to fulfil their promise and plunged single-handed into the army of the Latins and was killed. The Romans won the battle. His son of the same name also performed the *devotio* during the Third Samnite War in 295 BC. His son in turn sacrificed himself in the Battle of Asculum in 279 BC.

[4]Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC-43 BC) was a great Roman statesman and orator. Evola is likely referring to his works

De Finibus, Bonorum et Malorum (About the Ends of Goods and Evils), and Tusculanae Quaestiones (Questions

Debated at Tusculum).

[5]Titus Livius (59 BC-17 AD), author of The History of Rome. This passage is taken from Livy, vol. 3 (London: A.J. Valpy, 1833), p. 16.

[6]A pontifex was a priest in the ancient Roman religion.

[7]Auguste Bouché-Leclercq (1842-1923), a French scholar of Roman history. His works have not been translated.

[8] Latin: ‘leader’

The Roman Conception of Victory

[1] Sallust described the original Romans as the most religious of mortals: *religiosissimi mortales* (Cat., 13),

[2] and Cicero said that ancient Roman civilisation exceeded every other people or nation in its sense of the sacred: *omnes gentes nationisque superavimus* (Hat: *respon.*, IX, 19). Analogous testimonies are found in numerous variants in many other ancient writers. As against the prejudice of a certain historiography which persists in assessing ancient Rome from a solely legal and political point of view, what should be brought out is the fundamentally spiritual and sacred content of ancient Romanity, which should really be considered the most important element, because it is easy to show that the political, legal and ethical forms of Rome, in the last analysis, had as their common basis and origin precisely a special religious vision, a special type of relationship between man and the supra-sensory world.

But this relationship is of a quite different type from that characteristic of the beliefs which came to predominate subsequently. The Roman, like ancient and traditional men in general, believed in a meeting and mutual interpenetration of divine and human forces.

This led him to develop a special sense of history and time, to which we have drawn attention in another of our articles here, speaking about a book by Franz Altheim.

[3] The ancient Roman felt that the manifestation of the divine was to be found in time, in history, in everything which is carried out through human action, rather than in the space of pure contemplation, detached from the world, or in the motionless, silent symbols of a hyperkosmos or ‘super-world’. He thus lived his history, from his very origins onwards, more or less in terms of ‘sacred’, or at the very least ‘prophetic’ history. In his *Life of Romulus* (1:8) Plutarch

[4] says in so many words, ‘Rome could not have acquired so much power if in one way or another it had not had a divine origin, such as to show to the eyes of men something great and inexplicable.’

Hence the typically Roman conception of an invisible and ‘mystical’ counterpart to everything visible and tangible which transpires in the human world. This is why rites accompanied every explanation of Roman life, whether individual, collective or political.

Hence, also, the particular conception that the Roman had of fate: fate for him was not a blind power as it was for late ancient Greece, but the divine order of the world as development, to be interpreted and understood as means to an adequate science, so that the directions in which human action would be effective could be foretold, those along which this action could attract and actualise forces from above with a view not only to success, but also to a sort of transfiguration and higher justification.

Since this set of ideas applied to the whole of reality it reaffirmed itself also for ancient Rome in

the field of warlike enterprises, of battle, heroism and victory. This fact allows us to see the error of those who consider the ancient Romans essentially as a race of semi barbarians, who prevailed only through brutal force of arms, borrowing from other peoples, such as the Etruscans, Greeks and Syrians, the elements which served them in lieu of true culture. Rather, it is true that ancient Romanity had a particular mystical conception of war and victory, whose importance has oddly escaped the specialists in the study of Romanity, who have limited themselves to pointing out the many and well documented traditions in question in a distracted and inconsequential manner.

It was the essentially Roman opinion that, to be won materially, a war needed to be won or, at least, favoured – mystically. After the Battle of Trasimene, Fabius says to the soldiers, ‘Your fault is to have neglected the sacrifices and to have failed to heed the warnings of the oracles, rather than to have lacked courage or ability’ (Livy, History of Rome, 17:9, cf. 31:5; 36:2; 42:2).

No Roman war began without sacrifices and a special college of priests – the Feciales – was in charge of the rituals related to war, which was considered a ‘just war’, iustum bellum, only after these had been performed. As once pointed out by de Coulanges, [5]

the root of the military art of the Romans consisted originally in not being forced to fight when the gods were against it; that is, when by means of ‘fatal’ signs the agreement of forces from above with human forces was perceived to be absent.

Thus, the focus of the enterprise of war fell on a more than merely human plane – and both the sacrifice and the heroism of the combatant were considered to be more than merely human. The Roman conception of victory is particularly important.

In this conception every victory had a mystical side in the most objective sense of the term: in the victor, the chief, the imperator, applauded on the battlefield, was sensed the momentary manifestation of a divine force, which transfigured and trans-humanised him.

The military victory ritual itself, in which the imperator (in the original sense, not of ‘emperor’, but of victorious chief) was lifted on a special shield, is not devoid of symbolism, as can be inferred from Ennius:

“the shield, previously sanctified in the Capitoline temple of Jupiter, signifies here the altisonum coeli clupeum, the celestial sphere, beyond which victory raises the man who has won.

Revealing and unambiguous confirmations of this ancient Roman conception are provided by the nature of the liturgy and the pomp of the triumph. We speak of ‘liturgy’ since this ceremony with which every winner was honoured had in Rome a character much more religious than military. The victorious leader appeared here as a sort of manifestation or visible incarnation of the Olympian god, all the signs and the attributes of whom he wore. The quadriga of white horses corresponded to that of the solar god of the bright sky, and the mantle of the triumphant, the purple toga embroidered with gold stars, reproduced the celestial and stellar mantle of Jupiter. And so did the gold crown and the sceptre which surmounted the Capitoline sanctuary. And the winner dyed his face with minimum as in the cult of the temple of the Olympian God, to which

he then went to place solemnly before the statue of Jupiter the triumphal laurels of his victory, intending by this that Jupiter was its true author, and that he himself had gained it, essentially, as a divine force, a force of Jupiter: hence the ritual identification in the ceremony.

The fact that the aforementioned cloak of the triumphant corresponded to that of the ancient Roman kings could give rise to further considerations: it could remind us of the fact brought out by Altheim that even before the ceremony of the triumph of the king was defined he had appeared in the primitive Roman conception as an image of the celestial divinity: the divine order, over which the latter presided, was reflected and manifested in the human one, centred in the king. In this respect – in this conception, which, along with several others from the time of the origins, was to resurface in the Imperial period – Rome testifies to a universal symbolism, which is found again in a whole cycle of great civilisations in the Indo-Aryan world and Aryo-Iranian world, in ancient Greece, in ancient Egypt and in the Far East.

But, not to wander from the argument, let us point out another characteristic element in the Roman conception of victory. It is precisely because it was seen as a more than merely human event that the victory of a chief often assumed for the Romans the features of a numen, an independent divinity, whose mysterious life was made the centre of a special system of rituals designed to feed it, enliven it and confirm its invisible presence among men. The most well-known example is provided by the *Victoria Caesaris*. Each victory was believed to actualise a new centre of forces, separate from the particular individuality of the mortal man who had realised it; or, if we prefer, by victory the victor had become a force existing in an almost transcendent order: a force not of the victory achieved in a given moment of history, but, as the Roman expression stated exactly, of a ‘perpetual’ or ‘perennial’ victory. The cult of such entities, established by law, was designed to stabilise, so to speak, the presence of this force, so that it added invisibly to those of the race, leading it towards outcomes of ‘fortune’, making of each new victory a means for revelation and reinforcement of the energy of the original victory. Thus, in Rome, since the celebration of the dead Caesar and that of his victory were one and the same, and the games, which had ritual meaning, were consecrated to the *Victoria Caesaris*, he could be considered as a ‘perpetual victor’.

The cult of victory, which was believed to have prehistoric origins, can be said more generally to be the secret spirit of the greatness of Rome and of Rome’s faith in its prophetic destiny. From the time of Augustus the statue of the goddess Victory had been placed on the altar of the Roman Senate, and it was customary that every senator, before taking office, went to this altar and burned a grain of incense. The force of victory seemed thus to preside invisibly over the deliberations of the curia; [7] hands reached out towards its image when, with the coming of a new Princeps,

[8] fidelity was sworn to him and again on the Third of January of each year when solemn prayers were said in the Senate for the health of the Emperor and the prosperity of the Empire. It

is particularly worthy of interest that this was the most tenacious Roman cult of so-called 'paganism', surviving after the destruction of all the others.

Other considerations could be derived from the Roman notion of *mors triumphalis*, 'triumphal death', which shows various aspects with which we will perhaps deal on another occasion. Here we just want to add something about one special aspect of the heroic dedication connected to the ancient Roman concept of *devotio*. It expresses what in modern terms could be called a 'tragic heroism', but linked to a sense of supra-sensory forces and a higher and very specific purpose.

In ancient Rome *devotio* did not mean 'devotion' in the modern sense of the meticulous and over-scrupulous practice of a religious cult. It was, rather, a warlike ritual action in which the sacrifice of oneself was vowed and one's own life was dedicated consciously to 'lower' powers, whose unleashing was to contribute to bringing victory, on one the hand, by endowing one with irresistible strength and, on the other hand, by causing panic to the enemy. It was a rite established formally by the Roman State as a supernatural addition to arms in desperate cases, when it was believed that the enemy could hardly be defeated by normal forces.

From Livy (8:9) we know all the details of this tragic ritual and also the solemn formula of evocation and self-dedication which the one who intended to sacrifice himself for victory had to pronounce, repeating it from the pontifex, clothed in the *praetexta*, his head veiled, his hand at his chin and his foot on a javelin. After that he plunged to his death in the fray, a hurled, 'fatal' force, no longer human. There were noble Roman families in which this tragic ritual was almost a tradition: for example, three of the stock of the Deci performed it in 340 B.C. in the war against the rebellious Latins, then again in 295 in the war against the Samnites, and once more in 79 at the Battle of Ascoli: as if this was 'a family law', as Livy puts it.

As pure inner attitude this sacrifice may recall, by its perfect lucidity and its voluntary character, what still happens today in Japan's war: we have heard of special torpedo boats, or of Japanese aeroplanes, hurled with their crew against the target and, once again, the sacrifice, almost always performed by members of the ancient warrior aristocracy, the samurai, has a ritual and mystical aspect. The difference is certainly that they do not aim at a more than merely material action, a true evocation, to the same extent as in the ancient Roman theory of the *devotio*.

And naturally, the modern and, above all, Western atmosphere for thousands of reasons which have become, so to speak, constitutive of our being over the centuries makes it extremely difficult to feel and to move forces behind the scenes and to give every gesture, every sacrifice, every victory, transfiguring meanings, such as those discussed above. It is however certain that, even today, in this unleashed vicissitude one should not feel alone on the battlefields – one should sense, in spite of everything, relationships with a more than merely human order, and paths which cannot be assessed solely by the values of this visible reality can be the source of a force and an indomitability whose effects on any plane, in our view, should not be underestimated.

[1]Originally published on 16 May 1943 as 'La concezione romana della Vittoria' in *Augustea*.

[2]See note 4 in 'The Sacrality of War'.

[3]Franz Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion* (London: Methuen & Co., 1938).

[4]Mestrius Plutarchus (46-127) was a Greek historian. All of his biographies are collected in Plutarch's *Lives*.

[5]Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889), a French historian. His principal work was *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1956.

[6]Quintus Ennius (c. 239 BC-c. 169 BC) was a poet and historian of the Roman Republic. Only fragments of his works survive.

[7]The Roman Senate.

[8]Another term for the Roman Emperor

The Meaning and Context of Zen

We know the kind of interest Zen has evoked even outside specialized disciplines, since being popularized in the west by D.T. Suzuki through his books *Introduction to Zen Buddhism* and *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. This popular interest is due to the paradoxical encounter between East and West. The ailing West perceives that Zen has something "existential" and surrealistic to offer. Zen's notion of a spiritual realization, free from any faith and any bond, not to mention the mirage of an instantaneous and somehow gratuitous "spiritual breakthrough", has exercised a fascinating attraction on many Westerners. However, this is true, for the most part, only superficially. There is a considerable difference between the spiritual dimension of the "philosophy of crisis", which has become popular in the West as a consequence of its materialistic and nihilist development, and the spiritual dimension of Zen, which has been rooted in the spirituality of the Buddhist tradition. Any true encounter between Zen and the West, presupposes, in a Westerner, either an exceptional predisposition, or the capability to operate a metanoia. By metanoia I mean an inner turnabout, affecting not so much one's intellectual "attitudes", but rather a dimension which in every time and in every place has been conceived as a deeper reality.

Zen has a secret doctrine and not to be found in scriptures. It was passed on by the Buddha to his disciple Mahakassapa. This secret doctrine was introduced in China around the sixth century C.E. by Bodhidharma. The canon was transmitted in China and Japan through a succession on teachers and "patriarchs". In Japan it is a living tradition and has many advocates and numerous Zendos ("Halls of Meditation").

As far as the spirit informing the tradition is concerned, Zen may be considered as a continuation of early Buddhism. Buddhism arose as a vigorous reaction against the theological speculation

and the shallow ritualism into which the ancient Hindu priestly caste had degraded after possessing a sacred, lively wisdom since ancient times. Buddha mad tabula rassa of all this: he focused instead on the practical problem of how to overcome what in the popular mind is referred to as "life's suffering". According to esoteric teachings, this suffering was considered as the state of caducity, restlessness, "thirst" and the forgetfulness typical of ordinary people. Having followed the path leading to spiritual awakening and to immortality without external aid, Buddha pointed the way to those who felt an attraction to it. It is well known that Buddha is not a name, but an attribute or a title meaning "the awakened One", "He who has achieved enlightenment", or "the awakening". Buddha was silent about the content of his experience, since he wanted to discourage people from assigning to speculation and philosophizing a primacy over action. Therefore, unlike his predecessors, he did not talk about Brahman (the absolute), or about Atman (the transcendental Self), but only employees the term nirvana, at the risk of being misunderstood. Some, in fact, thought, in their lack of understanding, that nirvana was to be identified with the notion of "nothingness", an ineffable and evanescent transcendence, almost bordering on the limits of the unconscious and of a state of unaware non-being. So, in a further development of Buddhism, what occurred again, mutatis mutandi, was exactly the situation against which Buddha had reacted; Buddhism became a religion, complete with dogmas, rituals, scholasticism and mythology. It eventually became differentiated into two schools: Mahayana and Hinayana. The former was more grandiose in metaphysics and Mahayana eventually grew complacent with its abstruse symbolism. The teachings of the latter school were more strict and to the point, and yet too concerned about the mere moral discipline which became increasingly monastic. Thus the essential and original nucleus, namely the esoteric doctrine of the enlightenment, was almost lost.

At this crucial time Zen appeared, declaring the uselessness of these so-called methods and proclaiming the doctrine of satori. Satori is a fundamental inner event, a sudden existential breakthrough, corresponding in essence to what I have called the "awakening". But this formulation was new and original and it constituted a radical change in approach. Nirvana, which had been variously considered as the alleged Nothingness, as extinction, and as the final end result of an effort aimed at obtaining liberation (which according to some may require more than one lifetime), now came to be considered as the normal human condition. By these lights, every person has the nature of Buddha and every person is already liberated, and therefore, situated above and beyond birth and death. It is only necessary to become aware of it, to realize it, to see within one's nature, according to Zen's main expression. Satori is like a timeless opening up. On the one hand, satori is something sudden and radically different from all the ordinary human states of consciousness; it is like a catastrophic trauma within ordinary consciousness. On the other hand, satori is what leads one back to what, in a higher sense, should be considered as normal and natural; thus, it is the exact opposite of an ecstasy, or trance. It is the rediscovery and the appropriation of one's true nature: it is the enlightenment which draws out of ignorance or out of the subconscious the deep reality of what was and will always be, regardless of one's condition in life. The consequence of satori is a completely new way to look at the world and at

life. To those who have experienced it, everything is the same (things, other beings, one's self, "heaven, the rivers and the vast earth"), and yet everything is fundamentally different. It is as if a new dimension was added to reality, transforming the meaning and value. According to the Zen Masters, the essential characteristic of the new experience is the overcoming of very dualism: of the inner and outer; the I and not I; of finitude and infinity; being and not-being; appearance and reality; "empty" and "full"; substance and accidents. Another characteristic is that any value posed by the finite and confused consciousness of the individual, is no longer discernible. And thus, the liberated and the non-liberated, the enlightened and the non-enlightened, are yet one and same thing. Zen effectively perpetuates the paradoxical equation of Mahayana Buddhism, nirvana-samsara, and the Taoist saying "the return is infinitely far". It is as if Zen said: liberation should not be looked for in the next world; the very world is the next world; it is liberation and it does not need to be liberated. This is the point of view of satori, of perfect enlightenment, of "transcendent wisdom" (prajnaparamita)

Basically, this consciousness is a shift of the self's center. In any situation and in any event of ordinary life, including the most trivial ones, the ordinary, dualistic and intellectual sense of one's self is substituted with a being who no longer perceives an "I" opposed to a "non-I", and who transcends and overcomes any antithesis. This being eventually comes to enjoy a perfect freedom an incoercibility. He is like the wind, which blows where it wills, and like a naked being which is everything after "letting go" -abandons everything, embracing poverty.

Zen, or at least mainstream Zen, emphasizes the discontinuous, sudden and unpredictable character of satori disclosure. In regard to this, Suzuki was at fault when he took issue with the techniques used in Hindu schools such as Samkya and Yoga. These techniques were also contemplated in early Buddhist texts. Suzuki employed the simile of water, which in a moment turns into ice. He also used the simile of an alarm, which, as a consequence of some vibration, suddenly goes off. There are no disciplines, techniques or efforts, according to Suzuki, which by themselves may lead one to satori. On the contrary, it is claimed that satori often occurs spontaneously, when one has exhausted all the resources of his being, especially the intellect and logical faculty of understanding. In some cases satori it is said to be facilitated by violent sensations and even by physical pain. Its cause may be the mere perception of an object as well as any event in ordinary life, provided a certain latent predisposition exists in the subject.

Regarding this, some misunderstandings may occur. Suzuki acknowledged that "generally speaking, there are no indications on the inner work preceding satori". However, he talked about the necessity of first going through "a true baptism of fire". After all, the very institution of the so-called "Halls of Meditation" (Zendo), where those who strive to obtain a satori submit themselves to a regimen of life which is partially analogous to that of some Catholic religious orders, bespeaks the necessity of a preliminary preparation. This preparation may last for several years. The essence of Zen seems to consist in a maturation process, identical to the one in which one almost reaches a state of an acute existential instability. At that point, the slightest push is

sufficient to produce a change of state, a spiritual breakthrough, the opening which leads to the "intuitive vision of one's nature". The Masters know the moment in which the mind of the disciple is mature and ready to open up; it is then that they eventually give the final. Decisive push. This push may sometimes consist of a simple gesture, an exclamation, in something apparently irrelevant, or even illogical and absurd. This suffices to induce the collapse of the false notion of individuality. Thus, satori replaces this notion with the "normal state", and one assumes the "original face, which one had before creation". One no longer "chases after echoes" and "shadows". This under some aspects brings to mind the existential theme of "failure", or of "being shipwrecked" (das Scheitern, in Kierkegaard and in Jaspers). In fact, as I have mentioned, the opening often takes place when all the resources of one's being have been exhausted and one has his back against the wall. This can be seen in relation to some practical teachings methods used by Zen. The most frequently employed methods, on an intellectual plane, are the koan and the mondo. The disciple is confronted with a saying or with questions which are paradoxical, absurd and sometimes even grotesque and "surrealistic". He must labour with his mind, if necessary for years, until he has reached the extreme limit of all his normal faculties of comprehension. Then, if he dares proceed further on that road he may find catastrophe, but if he can turn the situation upside down, he may achieve metanoia. This is the point where satori is usually achieved.

Zen's norm is that of absolute autonomy; no gods, no cults, no idols. To literally empty oneself of everything, including God. "If you meet Buddha on the road, kill him", a saying goes. It is necessary to abandon everything, without leaning on anything, and then to proceed forward, with one's essence, until the crisis point is reached. It is very difficult to say more about satori, or to compare it with various forms of initiatory mystical experience whether Eastern or Western. One is supposed to spend only the training period in Zen monasteries. Once the disciple has achieved satori, he returns to the world, choosing a way of life that fits his need. One may think of satori as a form of transcendence which is brought to immanence, as a natural state, in every form of life.

The behaviour which proceeds from the newly acquired dimension, which is added to reality as a consequence of satori, may well be summarized by Lao Tzu's expression: "To be the whole in the part". In regard to this, it is important to realize the influence which Zen has exercised on the Far-Eastern way of life. Zen has been called "the samurai's philosophy," and it had also been said that "the way of Zen is identical to the way of archery," or to the "way of the sword". This means that any activity in one's life, may be permeated by Zen and thus be elevated to a higher meaning, to a "wholesomeness" and to an "impersonal activity". This kind of activity is based on a sense of the individual's irrelevance, which nevertheless does not paralyze one's actions, but which rather confers calm and detachment. This detachment, in turn, favours an absolute and "pure" undertaking of life, which in some cases reaches extreme and distinct forms of self-sacrifice and heroism, inconceivable to the majority of Westerners (e.g. the kamikaze in WWII).

Thus, what C.G. Jung claims is simply ridiculous, namely that Psychoanalysis, more than any

other Western school of thought, is capable of understanding Zen. According to Jung, satori coincides with the state of wholeness, devoid of complexes or inner splitting, which psychoanalytic treatment claims to achieve whenever the intellect's obstructions and its sense of superiority are removed, and whenever the conscious dimension of the soul is reunited with the unconscious and with "Life". Jung did not realize that the methods and presuppositions of Zen, are exactly the opposite of his own. There is no "subconscious", as a distinct entity, to which the conscious has to be reconnected; Zen speaks of a superconscious vision (enlightenment, bodhi or "awakening"), which actualizes the "original and luminous nature" and which, in so doing, destroys the unconscious. It is possible though, to notice similarities between Jung's view's and Zen', since they both talk about the feeling of one's "totality" and freedom which is manifested in every aspect of life. However, it is important to explain the level at which these views appear to coincide.

Once Zen found its way to the West, there was a tendency to "domesticate" and to moralize it, playing down its potential radical and "antinomian" (namely, antithetical to current norms) implications, and by emphasizing the standard ingredients which are held so dear by "spiritual" people, namely love and service to one's neighbour, even though these ingredients have been purified in an impersonal and non-sentimental form. Generally speaking, there are many doubts on the "practicability" of Zen, considering that the "doctrine of the awakening" has an initiatory character.

Thus, it will only be able to inspire a minority of people, in contrast to later Buddhist views, which took the form of a religion open to everyone, for the most part a code of mere morality. As the re-establishment of the spirit of early Buddhism, Zen should have strictly been an esoteric doctrine. It has been so as we can see by examining the legend concerning its origins. However, Suzuki himself was inclined to give a different account; he emphasized those aspects of Mahayana which "democratize" Buddhism (after all, the term Mahayana has been interpreted to mean "Great Vehicle", even in the sense that it extends to wider audiences, and not just to a few elect). If one was to fully agree with Suzuki, some perplexities on the nature and on the scope of satori may arise. One should ask whether such an experience merely affects the psychological, moral or mental domain, or whether it affects the ontological domain, as is the case in every authentic initiation. In that event, it can only be the privilege a very restricted number of people.

from "**Intro to Magic vol.2**", Abraxas

Solutions of Rhythm and Liberation

While man in mortal life is "one who has departed from Being" or "one who is outside Being," he who freezes the "waters" in himself and banishes the ghosts of fog, thirst, and fever of his human existence is returning to "Being." The healing solution is as follows: by "Being," you become both liberated and liberator, and the magic of Identity begins within you. That which is

above and that which is below move to conjoin in a single thing, which comes from the infinite and, luminously freeing itself, goes to the infinite.

You become a participant in this process: you perceive its rhythm within your senses, your members, and your gestures, which can now support it, and you express it. At every moment you now feel like the commander of innumerable forces, present and yet invisible, as in a calm, heroic enthusiasm.

You continue and complete and free their essence, and this fire that inflames every act of your new life as a Liberated One is the very fire of sacrificial Magic: a sacrifice in which “he who sacrifices, that to which he sacrifices, the thing sacrificed, and the sacrificial act are one and the same.” 2

Limitation here falls away; the radiance is absolute. Whatever I have told you hitherto about magic, know it as leading to this supreme state. It should not seem remote to you, nor in vain to establish it in the spirit: for I assure you that distant things must overshadow things close by, if the beginning is to arise in them.

The quantity or degree is of no importance: it is the sense of light and sacrificial liberation, for “the energy of the divine Fire itself shines forth spontaneously in all directions, and being both self-called and self-operating, is active in like manner through all things” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, IV, 3).

You should anticipate it and let it penetrate your waking soul in the first operations of detachment, of “Silence”—and in the fixed exaltation of the Mirror, or fecundating with the hard masculinity of the sulfurous Fire the sympathetic, fluid, and mercurial feminine—then in animating or projecting symbols and images and signatures and names of Power—and finally in preparing for the ritual, in the evocation, the invocation, the magic of conjuration, of salvation, of transgression.

Know this: the spirit must shatter your self-image that the being of space has petrified. High magic only works when fecundated by the infinite, the breath of “that which is,” through the spiral shudders of communication. Forgetting the “human,” you act as the wind blows, as fire burns, as light shines, as pure, naked power; then the desert silence, the ocean calm, and the telluric stirring of the elements are all one in the spirit.

Think, by way of analogy, of independent rhythmic patterns that run, intersect, succeed, or overtake on the same line, yet without meeting or interfering, because their tempi or periods are different. But according to their laws, there are points at which a syntony is created: for an instant, the two rhythms become identical, and then in a flash something new results, a new series is revealed as their synthesis. These are the “solutions of rhythm.” Now consider your human consciousness as one of those rhythmic series. It develops inside a far bigger pattern, the pattern of the rhythm of Reality. But you cannot perceive this because your “tempo” is different. Although in the very bosom of Being, you are living in the world of the “other”: the world of

specters, the world that is not the world of men—until at a certain point of your life a correspondence may occur, whether through a near-fatal event, or through Art or Ritual. For an instant, your eyes open in the miracle of awakening: it is absolute vision—or absolute action. You are no longer yourself, the world no longer the world—everything is something else. Unless your ever-vigilant animal nature intervenes to draw your attention elsewhere, for a moment the mist clears: you know Knowledge—and in that knowledge, the nature of Realization and Liberation.

And if you have not chosen blind Fortuna as your Goddess, it is a matter of your inner refinement, through subtle listening to the rhythm of your consciousness, through Hermetic work and the ceaseless vigil of wisdom, patience, and instinct—all this to prepare the state in which the rhythms may meet. Likewise, it depends partly on you whether the vault closes again after the fleeting miracle, and the regimen of “sleep” returns, or whether you can establish yourself in participation in the Real.

I can tell you no more. Gather in your intellect all the symptoms and anticipations that will not fail to manifest sporadically, if you continue to practice constantly and attentively. For every glimpse, turn within to catch the state of consciousness that accompanies it, so as to discover the rhythm, and with the subtle art of love to attract and adapt your spirit to it.

The first echoes of “unison” will come from the people around you. You will think of something, and then without any intention on your part, someone else will think of it simultaneously, and unmotivated. He will be amazed, and say that you or he has “mind-read.” It is not mind-reading, much less chance: it is a new, subtle power of thought, “volatile” and sympathetic, because the chains are loosening that have kept it vibrating only in the closed prison of your ego. Now and then symptoms of telepathy, telesthesia, and intuition will emerge; fragments of distant worlds and scenes, sudden openings to an inwardness suffused with a gentle, immaterial light. And it will also happen that your states of soul, scarcely touching you, suddenly escape from you to glide into others and unexpectedly but irresistibly penetrate them.

“Alienations”: you suddenly find yourself inside the person before you. You are he. You follow his train of thought and see clearly within him, as if into a room that is suddenly filled with light: and you also “see” his consciousness, feeling how he knows nothing of himself, how he looks outward, how he is outside and cannot discern himself. Nor does he know you, in this moment when you are in him. Just a flash, then you are back in yourself. The curtain closes.

The law of space returns.

All this happens at first in an unexpected way and without your will. You know it as a peripheral resonance of your effort, of the action of the rituals on the substance in which you are to awaken your sidereal senses. But as your whole being becomes hermetically habituated and harmonizes and unifies deep down, the “solutions of rhythm” will become less fortuitous and discontinuous.

They will be accompanied by fringe experiences of proximity and closure— more of the nature

of clarity than flashes—and at the same time the circle will enlarge; new series, more distant and occulted, will approach the nodes of interference.

For example, in an instant of inner light, when opening your eyes you may see the thick clouds open for a moment on a free and clear sky. Abyssal forces are released inside you: with a start such as you have never felt before, you will see your half-darkened room invaded by the red glow of a fire raging in the distance. The pace of something you are doing will accelerate and then stop—and your attention will turn to the voices of frightened people in the street, around a tram that at this moment has unexpectedly stopped. In your thought or your desire there suddenly arises “Let this happen”—and instantly it happens.

You may be ignorant of many things that happen in the wider world, but when you learn of them afterward, the certainty of the correspondence arises in you, together with a strange and profound sense, indefinable, indelible, and disturbing, that it is no chance. The tempi of the two rhythms have met at a single and fateful point of unison, becoming simultaneously symbol, reality, significance; interiority and exteriority, will and reality.

It is a small step from there to the spontaneous awakening of the intellect in your spirit, through the miracle of transformation latent in the symbols, correspondences, and analogies of our Science. The confluence of multiple meanings, multiple orders, in a single symbol, which confuses the unknowing, is the potential for a synthesis that can lead you to “solutions of rhythm”: to peaks of absolute vision or absolute magic. For example, there are the Three—the Seven—the Twelve: signs which recur, return, and coincide analogically in the inner and the outer, in nature and the soul, in the above and the below, in space and time, in elements and in the body, in individual events and historical events, preparing circuits of unison and fulgurations that conclude in your being, in the Liberation of your being.

Moreover, in the sensation of your own body and its powers, through “unisons” and more radical resolutions, forms of cosmic consciousness begin to flash. In the oldest Tradition you learn that the Word, freed from death, becomes knowledge of the Fire; the sense of smell, freed from death, becomes the Wind; the Eye, freed from death, becomes the Sun; the Ear, freed from death, becomes Space; the Intellect, freed from death, becomes the splendour of the Moon; Blood and Sperm, freed from death, become Water.

Others will show you new ways of communication in the Metals: they tell of the Man of Copper, the Man of Iron, the Man of Mercury, the Man of Gold sleeping inside your body as elemental and planetary powers.

While the series converge, separating and reuniting, repelling and attracting each other as in a respiration of light, you will also see the same unity beginning to reproduce itself in your gestures, so that they spontaneously assume a ritual structure. In a given instant you surprise yourself in a certain position, and in a flash you perceive that it corresponds exactly to a symbol: like a shuddering wind it passes through your bones, and again the curtain moves aside, the lighting flashes: you see and you are.

Thereafter you will begin to understand the meaning of the sacred postures whose traces are still remembered in the statuary of the ancient Western priesthood, or indicated by Indian yoga, and you will learn their science. New things emerge from the shadows and shed light on a broader background. Nature and history themselves begin to speak to you in the language of ritual and symbol. The signatures that are Wisdoms and seal the being of Man glow silently through geographical situations and zoological structures, and also express themselves in dramatic form in social and temporal events and institutions. And the zodiacal Twelve that you find in the centers of life and death of your mortal body are also twelve cities, twelve disciples, twelve nations. The “black pole” at the base of the sidereal axis of initiation in the East is the Kabbalistic *luz* at the base of the sacral bone and of the spinal column, called “germ of resurrection”—and it is the “black stone” placed in the Forum at the beginning of the pagan sacred way. The Virgin birth, the Passion, the Ascent of the mountain, the Walking on the waters, the Crucifixion on the elements, and the Resurrection actually become visible episodes of a historical and lived life.

Through those and innumerable other significant points that you will gradually discover, reality near or far becomes symbolic again, and the symbol becomes reality; the physical becomes metaphysical, and the metaphysical physical.

Through the fixation of the frozen “waters” the depth gradually becomes transparent, though invisible through the tumult of agitation or the fever of intoxication.

In this way you progress from the magical knowledge of the Ritual which I have already taught you (Introduction to Magic, vol. II, chap. I.3) to the knowledge of the Ritual as sacrificial action. Once reintegration is achieved and the paths are opened, contact is integral and identity perfect. The force of things passes into man, while the light and the liberation of man transfuse into the world of the Real—and these are the flames of the Cosmic Fire, the “assignations of immortality” according to the magical Alliance.

The Supreme Mystery of the Initiations—that is what you now hear: in man is the liberation and the immortality of the gods. The god realizes the man—the man liberates the god.

Kremmerz says: you who undertake magical awakening are the center of a great multitude of invisible beings desirous of immortality—because they are all beings of fire, they are thirsty, and you have the water to quench their thirst. In the sacrificial action your consecration as one Detached, Unchained, Escaped—as I told you—arrests the blind course of the elemental forces composed of desire, of spontaneity all exhausted in the act that constitutes them—and produces the transformation of light, through which all the invisible worlds rejoice. The two rhythms coincide and the whole series is then one illumination.

The course of the seasons, of the Sun by day and the Moon by month, the burning of Fire, the motion of the Wind, the growth of vegetation, the consistence of the things that are—they are born in you, and you join and disjoin them in the sacrificial rituals, which in the archaic priesthood actually accompanied the great phases of natural phenomena, sustained them,

strengthened them, and transposed them into light by solutions of rhythm and of liberation.

Thus it was written: “In the beginning Prajapāti, having created together men and the sacrifice, said: ‘With this sustain the gods, and the gods will sustain you, so that together you will attain the supreme good.’”

And also: “When he sacrifices, the ātmā is the seat of the gods, and Supreme Wisdom.”

Ea, Initiatic Consciousness beyond the Grave

(Remarks on the Tibetan Book of the Dead)

Here we will simply highlight some fundamental and characteristic points, to complement what these pages have already said about the after-death state.

1. First of all, the Tibetan text emphasizes that what unfolds after death is not an inevitable event, but that actions are possible on the part of a spirit of someone physically dead that can be decisive for its future destiny. This view is seldom met with in explicit form in other traditions, especially those of a religious character. There are perhaps exceptions in the ancient Egyptian tradition, which also has a Book of the Dead, and partially in Greek Orphism and in Gnostic and Gnostic-Kabbalistic mysteriosophy.
2. The second point to be made is that these possibilities of action after death are not available to everyone. The Tibetan text refers to one who has followed the Way while alive and attained at least a certain degree of “knowledge,” if not a complete initiation. Great emphasis is placed on the attitude at the moment of death (if the type of death allows sufficient lucidity). In the environment where this text was written, its teachings about the experiences to be expected after death, their true nature, their meaning, and the attitude that one should take toward them are recalled to the dying person by a Master or a lama.
3. The fundamental qualities required for action in the beyond, which should have been developed through adequate disciplines during life, are the yogic power of concentration and fixing the mind, especially the imagination; fearlessness, the ability to master anguish, terror, desire or aversion; and the ability to “freeze” every instinctive reaction that comes from below. The text says that lacking these, all the “devotions” practiced during life are useless. The yogic focus of the mind in a dimensionless point (ekāgra) is also presupposed for maintaining the continuity of consciousness through the changes of state that take place immediately after the collapse of the physical body.
4. The basis of the text is the esoteric doctrine of the Supreme Identity, according to its special formulation in the Mahayana and the Vajrayana.

According to this doctrine, man in his essence or deepest dimension is altogether one with the Principle, and in the structure of his being is also one with the various divine powers. But he is unaware of it. This is the well-known doctrine of metaphysical ignorance, avidyā, which alone

determines finite and contingent existence, tangles man in a world of illusion and a game of actions and reactions, and causes the conditionings of fate. “Knowledge” is understood as knowledge of his true identity, as something lived or deeply suspected.

5. We might say that in the after-death experience the veil of illusion is ripped away. If the conscious principle can sustain it, it finds itself discovering what it is and what it has always been, metaphysically: first directly, then in the form of visions of beings, gods, and unearthly worlds. The essential thing in all these after-death trials is the degree of “knowledge,” i.e., the ability to avoid the illusion of any duality.
6. In this text, the order of experiences is somewhat contrary to that of other instructions for the usual after-death destiny. As mentioned, the latter consider that there are two deaths. The first is that of the physical body; the second, somewhat later, is the death of the psychic and subtle complex inherited from the human individuality, to which the dead person’s soul has remained attached and which finally also dissolves. This is the point at which the great alternative presents itself: either an obscuration, or else the liberation of the naked spiritual nucleus and its transfiguration into Light. In the latter case, this principle has already been partially awakened, consolidated, and generally become the center of the person’s existence.

The Tibetan text says that after a short period of unconsciousness (about three and a half days) there comes the “passage through the elements” (“Earth dissolves into Water, Water dissolves into Fire, Fire dissolves into Air”—as inner experiences). Then suddenly the supreme test occurs, the experience of the pure state of Being, dazzling, annihilating, with terrifying radiance and the “sound of a thousand thunders.” If the soul has the ability to identify with it, as though hurling itself out of itself, incinerating everything in itself that is “other” or “ignorance,” in an instant it will have attained the Great Liberation. But if it is unable, through fear or through the action of the roots that “ignorance” has grown in the course of finite existence, the highest opportunity offered beyond the grave is lost.

7. The text speaks of further experiences offered to one who has failed. It is the same supreme reality, metaphysically identical to the Self, that appears to them, no longer in the pure and formless state but in the shape of divine figures.

It may be a matter of “projections,” dramatized as visions of the divinities that were worshipped during life (thus varying according to the different religions but metaphysically equivalent). Here again the essential ability is to overcome the appearance of a duality: the capacity of “identification,” which evidently depends on the intensity and depth of a previous religion that was not simply devotional. If these transcendent projections impose themselves on the soul as separate entities, the test is failed. But if one succeeds in identification with them, the soul is assured of a certain condition of “divine” survival as surrogate for the Great Liberation. One first sees glorious divinities, powerful, radiant, and benevolent, but if the new test fails they transform like shapes in a kaleidoscope into terrifying divinities, wrathful, destructive, incarnating the soul’s own fears.

This obviously makes identification still more difficult, unless in life one has practiced the cult of such divinities and already carries their image in oneself.

8. The text uses the image of an elastic ball thrown to earth, which rises less high each time it bounces, to picture this sequence of experiences in their descending course. If these alternatives and tests are failed, it is because tendencies and complexes predominate in the soul that work against its complete deconditioning. The text describes successive phantasmagoria, explicable through the action of these tendencies, with fatal consequences. But it also urges one not to abandon oneself to them, to wrench oneself out of them, remembering the teachings one has received, not giving in to the illusion, and restraining the imagination and the mind, because the whole sequence of visions is never more than projections, with no reality of their own. The phantasmagoria of shapes and landscapes, pursuing demons and all the rest are nothing but a play of the imagination that has magically become free. The inability to restrain the corresponding reactions of the terrified or ecstatic soul, the urges to seek refuge or to indulge in delicious sensations, etc., lead the unknowing soul directly downward to a specific place or “birth” in a conditioned world. Thus the text exhorts the soul, even here, to “remember itself,” to overcome the illusion, to realize that it has to do with itself alone and with what it has determined in itself, and that it alone will be the maker of its destiny.
9. Under such circumstances, which represent a fall and the loss of the higher possibilities offered after death, there are still actions to be taken, as it were in extremis, to avoid the worst outcome. It is possible to collect oneself and use conjurations (formulae for “closing the womb of a given birth”), and even if one is caught in a movement that can no longer be stopped, to “steer” it to some degree. Even in these crises, within these ultimate possibilities, the decisive factor is to restrain the mind, and not to give in to the irresistible emotions of attraction or repulsion that make play with the soul.
10. If one fails again, it means that “desire,” the thirst for life and for earthly incarnation are prevailing in the soul. One last chance of liberty remains for avoiding specific births. The final scene, in every case, is linked to a somewhat Freudian situation: due to a blind and turbulent desire, the still discarnate soul sees the couple who will generate it united in sexual embrace. If the soul was male in its former existence, it is attracted to its mother-to-be; if female, to its father-to-be. It feels their orgasmic ecstasy and thereby is drawn into the womb.

Consciousness is then extinguished, the “waters” reclose on the fallen being, which “dies through rebirth” until its next death, whereupon with the possibilities gained by the new causes it will have created, it will face the same trials again.

Our text agrees partially with the Hindu teaching of the two post mortem paths: the divine path of him who “returns no more” and the so-called way of the fathers with rebirth in a specific family line. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is characterized by an uncommon clarity and logic. It reveals the common and popular religious images of the after-death state, with their divine

judgments and all the rest, as bugbears and opiates, and also demythologizes whatever sense may exist in the ideas of paradise, purgatory, and hell.

One notes the special emphasis on qualities that need to be obtained in one's lifetime, through suitable disciplines and control of one's own mind; they are not only of use in this existence and for progress along the Way, but also beyond the grave, in the battle for one's own destiny.

Iagla, *On the “Corrosive Waters”*

In the secret language of the Hermetic philosophers we frequently find the expression “Solvent”: “Universal solvent,” “Menstruum,” “Water that washes,” “Divine water,” “Water that opens the pores.” But beside them you also find more Luciferic terms: “Poison,” “Corrosive Water,” “Water of Tartarus,” “Philosophic vinegar,” “Strong waters.” Here the philosophers redouble their ambiguous veil and mask. They advise the greatest caution in using these waters.

Others advise against them altogether, because, as they say, these waters dissolve the body without preserving the spirits; they do not wash, but burn; they do not work with nature's slow fire but with the “devil's own haste.” Yet they still mention them; and this half-recognition that reveals and conceals fascinates by its very prohibition, as of a more dangerous and even fatal secret in the symbolic labyrinth of this strange art of metals and spirits.

What are the “corrosive waters”? What is their virtue? A quality of surprise, perhaps? A liminal virtue? Remember Éliphas Lévi's image of magical persistence: “Like the wave that keeps returning and ends by corroding even iron.” But this cannot be the action of the corrosive water, the poison-water.

Subtle as the former may be, it is the frontal action of normal waters, an action that knows no haste: rhythmic, penetrating, sympathetic. Poison or venom has a different effect altogether: it strikes and kills without rhythm, as a direct act. It sunders, slices apart. It is the viper's bite. So it must be another way.

Let us start with the symbols and try to understand them. It is not easy, because everything is connected as a whole behind this symbology, which leaves no breathing space. “Disconnect the spirit”—that stands at the centre, say the Hermetic philosophers, and they speak of it as of a “resurrection.” An incorporeal essence has been immersed in the body as in a dense medium, and thenceforth moves in a world of darkness.

This density must be dissolved, subtilized, through the soul's own power. It is a mysterious power, because the agent of resurrection is said to need resurrecting: a certain “new quality” has to appear in the soul itself. How one induces this “new quality” is the philosophers' secret. I think it is secret not because of some artificial monopoly, but in truth because rational analysis can no longer grasp the type of law that is working here.

You have read that a Master can transmit this “new quality.” That presupposes an organization, a “chain.” And the necessary qualification.

Spiritual Virility

Or else: long labour of the individual, in the dark, like boring a tunnel. The blows (practices, rituals, intentions) accumulate like the rhythmic return of Éliphas Lévi's waters, yet you notice nothing, you register no results, no tangible fruit. Suddenly the last wall collapses: a flood of fresh air and light rushes in.

Your soul is no longer the same. Was it self-transformation, or contact? with states of intelligence that are present, yet hidden, identical or different from your own consciousness, deeper? I do not know, neither would it help you much to know.

These are not the only methods, but along with others that you may be aware of, they form a single class, a uniform method: from within to without. The light has to be acquired in the soul; an "astral fire" must be lit there, a magical and philosophical fire, as they say. This is the first thing. Then the soul reacts on what envelops it, loosening the dense fabric, and a new vibrational capacity arises until a perfectly diaphanous quality is produced. It is the *visio spiritualis* (spiritual vision) within the speculum (mirror) of the re-illuminated body.

Invert the method, and stop at the beginning of this inverse direction. Then the strange symbols of the "poisonous water," the "philosophic corrosives" may begin to speak to you. This is authentic alchemy: the Hermetic manipulation of "double" agents, i.e., physical and tangible substances that at the same time carry psychic influences. To invert the method signifies this: instead releasing the body by means of the preliminary awakening of the soul, force the soul to awaken by means of special agents, which cause sudden reactions at the deepest level of the body's energies, like abrupt transitions to abnormal states of vibration and fluidic instability. This is the viper's bite, which suddenly pulls the ground from under your feet. What happens then? Either you are quicker than lightning, or you are caught by surprise and collapse as though from a hammer blow. It is a fine risk to take, a game for gamblers in the grand style.

I am dealing here with the extreme ways of using the "corrosive waters," the decisive and all-encompassing ways. It is very difficult for you to discover what substances have such powers, and the science of their dosage and immediate practice. This knowledge was already such a deep secret in archaic and sacerdotal times, and the gift of the "draught of immortality" so seldom given, even in response to an ardent thirst, rather than to the heedless curiosity and contempt for patient discipline that might make you desire such adventures today.

There are, however, diluted forms about which we can say a little—and more than has generally been said about them up to now.

First let us analyze the cause of the risk. It comes primarily from the fact that the so-called immortal and immutable soul is a fantasy. From the moment it "descends" into the fleshly body, it is "compromised." It is in fact transformed into the individuated consciousness of the individual being that you are. We will call this qualified state A. If as things stand, you—or rather not "you" but a certain power X—tears away the body and toxically corrodes the link with

the body, this causes the destruction of A, for the simple reason that the qualification or individuation is given by the body, just as one could say that a liquid has a certain “form” given it by a vessel, but only so far and so long as the vessel contains it. Therefore the destruction of A—or its death, dissolution of quality A into a zero quality, which we will call Z. Unless... unless the soul itself intervenes to bridge by its own act the leap from A to Z, simultaneously making this transformation from A to Z its own, from the formed to the formless state. You have already read about this: it is dying actively, initiatically.

The following image may help: you are standing here, on this crag. In front of you is another crag, and between the two, emptiness. If a sudden blow takes you unawares, in ninety nine percent of cases you will end up down there. But if you have the presence of mind to absorb the blow, to act almost before you are surprised; in other words, if you can include in your own impetus the unexpected external impulse—you leap—and find yourself on the opposite side. This crag beyond is the reconquest of a liberated consciousness. The first crag was consciousness burdened by the individual condition, subject to all that one is subjected to by way of a body.

You may find another analogy in this image. The blow that flings you out is understood as the action of the sudden “corrosives.” This action will always be a surprise, by its nature and because there is discontinuity in man between body and soul. As though the soul could see in front of itself, but not behind itself by turning round. In that “behind” the body begins, and the paths open that come from its depths, its occulted parts. Now, the explicit action of the “corrosive waters” comes from outside, works through the body, thus from behind. Here the situation is exactly like standing on the edge of the crag and not being able to predict the moment or the quality of the blow that hits you from behind. Without presence of mind as quick as lightning, the experience of this type of “corrosive waters” or “poisons” leads to ruin.

After that, I will pass on to milder cases. You see why the risk is minimized in the other method, the one starting from within, where the soul acts on itself with a “gentle fire” that accustoms it to detachment step-by-step, leading by degrees to the transformation from A (individuated state) to Z (non-individuated state), whereas in the other case decision and realization are instantaneous.

We can also seek to actualize this gradual process, with “dosings” of the force, with a method that starts from the body, using different substances or using the same ones in a different way or a different quantity. The image would then be of a leap divided into smaller, less dangerous leaps, taken such that a fall would not be fatal, though it would still incur unpleasant consequences, except for the final leap, which is more serious and decisive.

Beside the preceding image, another one may help—from Evola, if I remember rightly—of the growth, rise, and rapid movement of a wave, on which one allows oneself to be carried without fear, by always staying on the crest. By keeping oneself there, intoxication is transformed into illumination, falling into rising, fire into light. If one does not succeed, consciousness quickly darkens, and a sort of dull syncope occurs which often has pathological repercussions on the

organic functions; at any rate, a dismantling of what may be the person's internal unity and energy. In this case the corrosion of the compound does not liberate, but dissolves.

From a certain point of view, such pathological reactions may be considered as blockages or discharges bouncing back onto the physical body, due to awakened forces that have not found the way to transform themselves into states and liberations of consciousness. But one should consider that the same often applies to what manifests in people as illnesses and pain, commonly, "naturally," and without special practices. There are illnesses and pains that represent a blockage or excessive discharge in the psychophysical system, by certain forces to which the consciousness has been unwilling or unable to open itself. It is a matter (to use Novalis's precise expression, already cited in these pages), of the methods of an exalted force which strives to pass into transcendent sensations.

Furthermore, when through passivity the initiatic goal of the experience is missed, it can increase the power of entities to which the self has already offered a foothold, and also of others from whose action one would otherwise have been safe. It is then a case of obsession in the literal sense or of being involuntarily transported by forces emerging from the unconscious. Noting that alcohol itself is one of the "strong waters" of low efficiency, it is not difficult, thinking of its common effects, to conceive of the danger by analogy.

On this basis, you can also guess what typically happens when the experience takes a degenerative course. The forces of corrosion and liberation, in order to operate spiritually and cathartically, must be able to act, transformed, into forces of the pure self. If they do not do so, nor even discharge themselves in the physical body, but emerge in some other faculty of the self, the process is equally aborted. In two typical cases, this pathological course of events concerns the respective faculties of imagination and "sensation" (the latter understood as desire, appetite, pleasure).

When the imagination is seized and transported on the wings of the "dragon," there breaks forth the fantastic world of visionaries, the orgy of forms and colours of false clairvoyants, the dreams filled with subtle and seductive sensations of opium and hashish users.

When it is the faculty of sensation that is seized—alone, or together with the former—the force gives rise to a world of strange pleasures, indefinable, intoxicating, which gradually become a necessity for the soul. It creates vice. All those in ordinary life who abandon themselves to drug use are precisely on this plane, almost without exception.

In both cases the corrosion does not liberate, but destroys. The self sinks down, as fatally as the peak of a mountain when its base is gradually eroded.

You can therefore see the necessity of, of the centrality of: the self, perfectly conscious at its centre, ready to attract all reactions to itself alone, with instantaneous force—and silence all around.

As the process develops and the inner light increases, the bodily envelope lessens its grip, passes

the gap, comes into direct contact with the central and spiritual force, and rests upon it. Then you know from experience that in the literal sense the self rules your own body. In this state the instinctive automatisms are suspended, and you have—and must have—an absolute lucidity and control: you guide every movement directly with the mind in a sense of presence and power impossible to describe.

It becomes obvious in the first phases, whereas others would deflate, falling into trance or into an orgy of visions and “artificial paradises.”

In contrast, here is a memory that I will never lose: that of a night in the war.

I was very far away, in lucent detachment. The alarm suddenly sounds. I come to and get to my feet. I am on the artillery line. I will never be able to say what then broke out from the abyss, what supported me, what bore me miraculously through hours of hell, what acted in the supernatural lucidity of every gesture, every thought of any kind, of senses that grasped every perception almost before it was perceived. (And by “chance” I remained on my feet, unhurt—I knew that I could stand there, with grenades exploding around me.) Whatever Homer’s immortal gods could have been, who descended among the epic destinies of men, I certainly had a notion of it then; and I knew what men do not know in their petty talk about idols.

Ea, *On the Metaphysics of Pain and Illness*

Iagla’s essay in the previous part (V.1) mentioned the significance of pain: a topic that merits some further development. In Iagla’s words, “There are illnesses and pains that represent a blockage or excessive discharge in the psycho-physical system, by certain forces to which consciousness has been unwilling or unable to open itself.”

We can complete this idea with another, expressed by Nietzsche in his Will to Power (sect. 304), where he connects pain to fear, seeing there the repercussion of a shock caused by fear on the central seat (he adds: “of the nervous system”—but it is better just to say “central seat”), with a lasting sensation that is then projected onto the seat of a specific organ.

From an esoteric point of view, here is what is involved. There is a fixity that characterizes living beings as individuals: a fixity that should be understood both in the general sense of a tendency to maintain one’s own state, and in the special sense of a consciousness that has a fixed relationship with a determined organic structure. This fixity works such that whenever there is a contact with a transcendent force, it causes something comparable to a lesion—an interior lesion. In that moment consciousness, taken by surprise, is thrown into a state of agitation and fear for its own individuality, feeling its foundations shaking. This reaction or emotional backlash is like a contraction, an anguished shrinking of consciousness into itself in the face of the intervening force. The reaction, which naturally supplants the perception of that force in itself, is the deepest sense of the experience of pain and suffering.

Pain as such does not exist in an open consciousness, free in regard to its own individuality

(technically called “airy” or “void”). Instead, it produces the transition to another form of consciousness corresponding to the intervening force, and places itself in the body on a different organ from that on which the sense of self habitually rests. But the I that is afraid, that retreats in agitation and reacts by clutching itself and thus obstructing the communication, feels pain.

Objectively speaking, pain can be considered as a purely negative experience of the action of the extra-individual forces that are manifesting.

When the discharge is not exhausted in the equivalent emotion of pain, or more generally of suffering, or when it encounters a more subtle reaction of the individual, then it descends to deeper levels of the being. There it gives rise to abnormal saturations that likewise take the form of blockages or non-solutions, caused by the individual’s elements and functions which resist the change of state; and these constitute the true essence of certain illnesses.

In such a case, all that modern medical science can say is often based on the reversal of cause and effect, given that the plane on which the true causes are found is inaccessible to either physical eye or microscope.

An explanation can only come from an occult type of investigation, such as was often at the basis of ancient medicine, which was indeed considered a sacred and priestly art. Through such an investigation one could learn the subtle action of certain substances when used medically: specifically, in the sense of forces which, following certain laws of symmetry, could balance or upset those agents that were in the body and polarized toward causing illness.

Naturally this presupposed a knowledge of occult physiology, together with the various correspondences between organic structures and natural elements. From this point of view, one might also have recognized that some modern remedies can cause new illnesses, different from those that they cure, for reasons of which the average doctor has not the slightest notion.

What has been said about pain in general may extend to the special case of pain due to external causes, such as injuries and lesions in the proper sense, albeit only within certain limits. Here it is not a matter of intervention by non-individual forces that are somehow distinct from man, but of forces that man carries within himself, in his depths, beneath the zone where ordinary life unfolds. When the very condition of that life—its organic unity—is wounded or damaged, those latent forces are obliged to intervene, to come up as a reserve to repair and reintegrate the endangered organism. They now rise to consciousness, but cannot present themselves except in some transcendent guise, thus causing the same state of anguish and suffering as already mentioned. (Note that in the other case, too, the forces always come from within: the body is the final station; the psyche is a closer zone, but not the point of departure.) This state is then projected and fixed on the affected part and on the functions concerned with reintegration, which likewise enter an abnormal state of saturation. The latter takes the visible form of fever, together with pain or on its own.

In such a case, if the individual’s fear could be eliminated, the unblocked irruption of deep forces

would bring about an ecstatic state. On that basis it would even be possible to make these forces act in direct form, magically and thaumaturgically, causing “miraculous” phenomena such as wounds that suddenly close, leaving no trace; poisons completely neutralized in their powers, which can be extracted from the body and discharged elsewhere, etc.

In these cases, and even in far more modest ones, the secret always lies in a supreme and subtle attention to one’s own interiority, and in an attitude of absolute activity, boldness, impulsiveness, and mastery of the moment in which the alteration occurs. The healing forces then flow directly to the I and consequently remain in the pure state, avoiding the fall that would bring them into the physiological system. Then they can act in an extra-normal manner.

This significance of pain and illness is implicit in what we have said repeatedly about the ultimate case of illness and suffering, namely death. It is a central teaching of our traditions that the potential of death and that of initiation are one and the same thing. Hūm, the mantra of awakening the kundalīnī, is also the mantra of Mṛtyu (death). “The soul of man,” says Plutarch, “feels at the moment of death the same passion as those who are initiated into the Great Mysteries; and as word corresponds to word, so fact to fact: τελευτᾶν (to die) and τελεῖσθαι (to be perfected/initiated).”

It is a moment of crisis for the individuality, which is either victorious and is reborn transformed in a transcendent state (initiation), or succumbs, broken in its rigid structure that it could not overcome (death). The adept has used for this initiation the same forces that in others produce death; and he is an adept because he was not afraid of it (not in the sense of ordinary “courage” but in a superior sense), because his consciousness was able to remain active in respect to it, and to unite itself with the power of death.

Thus by analogy and on a smaller scale, one can understand the statement that certain forms of illness can bring forth moments of illumination. Likewise, we know of schools and also traditions in savage peoples, in which suffering has been considered as a means of attaining ecstasy, as in the cases of shamans, flagellants, etc. We might make many other suggestions: for example, explaining why sometimes prayer in states of intense pain can cause extraordinary effects, facilitating a state of transcendence and thus the conversion of the forces we have mentioned. Many people may have been struck by the special sense of a beauty, as it were nonhuman and luminous, which sometimes passes over even common, deformed, and distorted faces, right after they recover from a mortal suffering, such as after an operation. It is like a reflection and trace of that greater thing that has taken place in them, and which they have only experienced passively.

from ***“Intro to Magic vol.3”***

Ea, *Aristocracy and the Initiatic Ideal*

Among the typical confusions of today’s various “spiritualist” groups is their disclaiming of the eminently aristocratic character of everything pertaining to initiatic science.

Seen from the outside it is a blatant absurdity that shows the mental level of today's spiritualist currents, especially the Theosophical ones. While they pretend to be proclaiming and revaluing the teachings of the ancient Wisdom, they indulge in democratic and humanitarian views, professing the gospel of more or less universal equality, if not a sort of "social service," and applying this to a progressivism and evolutionism even in cosmic terms. Anthroposophy, too, beside its initiatic pretensions and the excesses of what it claims to be clairvoyance, has given as the watchword for the immediate tasks of "evolution" the Christianizing motive of "love." But contradiction and absurdity are at their most blatant in modern Freemasonry. This organization, to which some still attribute the initiatic character that it has long lacked, and which is structured internally by a complex hierarchical system of degrees and honours (though often only artificial ones), is the selfsame organization that from the start has embraced the "immortal principles" of the French Revolution and of liberalism, presenting itself with rare exceptions as a sort of laic and militant religion of world democracy.

Against all this, we must state outright that the only principles that an initiatic knowledge, rightly understood, can establish and justify are those of difference, higher authority, hierarchy, and aristocracy. Whereas today's counterfeits of esoteric wisdom draw their membership from the fringes of culture, political life, and official science, one should not forget that in every normal and traditional civilization that wisdom held an eminently central position. It was the heritage and privilege of royal and priestly castes, the legitimate holders of supreme power, who exercised a formative and orienting influence on every facet of life in the subordinate social strata. Esotericism and adeptship are by definition as antidemocratic as one could possibly imagine.

We move on to a second point, the main one to which we want to draw attention. Keeping in mind that esoteric science is simultaneously a regal and a priestly art, Éliphas Lévi asks with good reason of anyone wanting to approach it: Do you feel a kingly nature within yourself? A priestly one? Such a question is not meant to demoralize, but indicates that one must at least have clear ideas about a basic human qualification. This is especially true in our time, when the type of the adept is lumped together with the often suspect type of the "occultist," and of creatures like mediums, spiritualists, sensitives, and diviners who do not even attain the level of a sane and normal man. A certain natural aristocratic qualification, as the mark of a human type that is not just normal but superior, is the general premise for any participation in an initiatic order, which for that reason was restricted to an elite, and always will be.

At the same time, among those who have attained a certain level there is the "Hermetic," Rosicrucian, or Taoist type of initiate, whose true nature is imperceptible and who from the outside may be mistaken for an ordinary man.

Yet there is also the superior form of expression that materialized in what was once the aristocrate, and it formed the foundation of the spiritual significance that originally belonged to

every true nobility.

The idea that the aristocracies emerged and established themselves through a sort of Darwinian “natural selection” and through domination of the strongest, even if of the Nietzschean “superman” type, stems from misunderstanding or ignorance. The origins of almost all ancient aristocracies and of royalty itself were sacral, having some definite reference to the initiatic order itself.

Especially within the framework of a heroic-warrior tradition (see *Introduzione alla Magia*, vol. II, cap. XI

1), it was essentially the aristocracy that exercised that mediating function and demonstrated higher human possibilities: a function that in the religious-sapiential traditions was represented by the figure of the priest and the ascetic. Moreover, in Western chivalry and partly also in feudalism, the nobility often displayed that inner and spiritual dimension, given the existence of a chivalric initiation and of hidden veins that nourished its most typical organizations. A special study of the heraldry and emblematics of ancient noble lineages might uncover references to an effective esoteric symbolism, even if these elements often only survive as mute witnesses, yet no less significant for that. Giambattista Vico himself suspected as much.

The aristocratic way of being is typified by a superiority that is virile, free, and personalized. It corresponds to the demand—which had typical expressions in the classical world—that what is lived internally as spirituality should manifest outwardly in an equilibrium of body, soul, and will; in a tradition of honour, high bearing, and severity in attitude, even in the details of dress; in a general style of thinking, feeling, and reacting. Even though from the outside it may seem like mere formality and stereotypical rules (into which nobility may often have fallen), that style can be traced to its original value as the instrument of an inner discipline: to what we might call a ritual value.

On the inward side, the traditional aristocratic type possesses a special “ascesis,” a sense of superiority to the mere appetite for life; a predominance of ethos over pathos; an inner simplicity and disdain for the crude immediacy of urges, emotions, and sensations. Therein lies the secret of a serenity that is not indifference but regal superiority, the capacity of an alert and keen mind no less than of firm and decisive action, typical of the noble type. The absence of the impulses that drive men to the banquet of life as though they were starving; the self-possession that is not a preoccupation but a simplification, as of an ever present second nature; the composure and conscious equilibrium that is both “style” and “rule”—all this, while forming part of the ideal aristocrat or gentleman, is also found in the description of figures like the Greek sage, the Buddhist ascetic, or the Perfect Man of the Far East.

Inner superiority, rather than simple force, gives rise naturally to the dignity, capacity, and rights of the true leaders, who can arouse in others a spontaneous recognition and a pride in following and serving them.

What distinguishes the aristocratic quality from that of an ascetic in the common Christian sense is the fact that its effective superiority, as described, does not imply renunciation nor despise appearances, but takes concrete form in a worldly expression, making it the principle of a regular process of refinement and selection. Nobility includes aspects of good taste, tact, generosity, and regality, which were traditionally due to its superiority to immediate interests and the crude demands of naturalistic life, rather than to possessing greater material wealth. And if from the moralistic point of view it was sometimes accused of corruption, it should be understood thus: one should not confuse the privilege of someone who can permit himself certain things only because he also has the power to abstain from them, with the licentiousness of one who is a slave to vice and excess; for if there were ever two contraries, it is these.

Another point needs emphasizing. If the aristocrat becomes master of himself; if he is prepared to count life and happiness as something less than honour, faith, and tradition; if he is capable of forbearance and active sacrifice—this comes from a direct intuition of the blood, which makes him realize that all this is good, that to will all this is good and makes one superior and noble. To feel these specific values spontaneously is the very sign of nobility. Not to feel them but to need supports and external justifications defines the common man.

Thus, the aristocratic code is sufficient unto itself, based on an innate style and on a different nature from that of the majority of humans.

Naturally, we must recognize the role that heredity also plays here. Just as there is a physical and biological heredity, there is also a psychic and spiritual one, which in traditional societies justified the principle of exclusion and caste that seems so intolerable to the demagogic and individualism of our day. Just as an animal does not become domesticated at a stroke, thus aristocratic tradition only won its effective and objective value through the slow and steady acquisition, conservation, and preservation of subtle dispositions on the basis of an influence from above, passed down from one generation to another. Hence bearing an illustrious name and its heraldic arms also meant possessing, as a psychophysical and subtle preformation, the virtual heredity of special forms of interest, sensibility, and instinct. Given this, the individual found himself in a privileged position for aspiring to a level and an achievement that would have cost others, dependent only on their own resources, a life of toil, striving, and even violence to their own nature. And because of this essential refinement, which is even imprinted on the facial and bodily features and attitudes, it is largely true that “Lords” are born and not made. The principle is equally true that the mixture of castes, when these really answer to their function in traditional civilizations, is a crime, because it thoughtlessly breaks an occult and precious continuity, which is of the blood and also beyond the blood.

Certainly, that which has already been destroyed, due to multiple factors, cannot by its very nature be rebuilt from scratch. Today one can only count on fragments and on the timely emergence in one person or another of hereditaries, actualized in different ways from what was normal in other civilizations, where they were largely based on blood alone.

In any case, given the unfavourable conditions of our times we should be under no illusions, because this esoteric teaching is as true as ever: that spirituality has nothing to do either with simple “culture” or with beliefs and “theories,” or with vague aspirations—in short with nothing peripheral to the existential core of each person. Spirituality means an effective superiority woven into the very rhythm of the blood. An equally well-known teaching is that the only things of initiatic value are those efforts and realizations which succeed in moulding and transforming a deep stratum that should be considered, not metaphorically but objectively, as bound up with the blood: thus with inborn tendencies, atavistic forces, obscure organic energies, and with the subconscious of the I. We know that in a teaching such as Hinduism, it is often said that the final goal of yoga can only be attained as the end of an effort that in previous existences has prepared a suitable body and a complex of subtle dispositions.

Even if this is only taken as a popular way of expression, the basic idea is still valid and connects with what we have been saying about the tradition of aristocracy. Hence one may understand why in some civilizations access to the Mysteries and initiation was reserved for the higher castes. Remember that the qualities recognized in the aristocratic type are the same as those of the outward type of the initiate, especially as the “regal” tradition conceived of it. The purity of aristocratic blood, understood in a strict and real sense, with the dispositions linked to it, is the best “support” for an initiatic realization, already containing that “quintessence” that, when higher influence intervenes, yields the best fruit.

These principles always presuppose a complete and traditional type of civilization.

Yet even in the present state of affairs, despite the democratic and humanitarian ideas of modern “spiritualism” that we have criticized, this close relation between the aristocratic quality and everything initiatic must still exist.

This holds good both in the upward direction, because initiation can never be a concern of the masses or of a majority, and implies a distinctive quality even on the organic level, and in the downward direction, because as though coming full circle, the figure of the aristocrat is the one that best suits the expression and exteriorization of the quality awoken, or reawakened, by the “Royal Art.” A final point that perhaps merits attention is that the aristocratic ideal, described above as chiefly linked to a tradition of the warrior type, is essentially incompatible with the views of the religion that has come to predominate in the West.

Whereas this ideal rests on the necessity and the spiritual value of difference and inequality among men, the presupposition of Christianity is a religious consecration of the contrary principle of equality and brotherhood. The aristocrat, on the basis of his experience of superiority toward himself and a heroic disdain for existence, knows neither the rights nor the respect for “man” that Christianity has introduced in the West and which has grown into a veritable superstition. The law of the nobleman is honour, justice, the healthy pride of one who holds high his own tradition and is armed with the calm awareness of his own virtue. All that has a notoriously “luciferic” odour for Christianity, whose values are more of feeling oneself as a

“sinner,” humility, repentance, charity, forgiveness, and prayer. The Gospel principle of returning good for evil is not for aristocrats: they may pardon and be generous, but only to a vanquished enemy, not to one still standing in all the force of his injustice. Nor is love an aristocratic principle, in the sense of a need to embrace, commune with, and take care of those who may not even want or deserve it. Relations between aristocratic equals have nothing communistic or fraternal about them: they are facts of loyalty, recognition, mutual respect, with each keeping his own dignity distinct. For this reason there is nothing in the hierarchy of the warrior caste resembling a “mystic” bond, an incorporeal and impersonal dependency. Bonds are formed in the open, by free relations between free forces—taking the term “force” in the broadest sense, of which the physical represents only a particular and inferior case.

From all this it is evident that if a true aristocratic tradition could be reconstituted, it would also open a way for the West to rediscover itself, discarding the influences of a spirituality and a morality that are, after all, alien to it, and then to seek out those influences that truly suit it: those that are not only compatible with initiatic values, but which for that reason can represent its most natural expression.

One hardly need mention the state of degeneration in which the remnant of European nobility finds itself today, compared to its original tradition.

Things seem to have reached a point where reconstructive action can no longer find a basis in it. Besides, the whole trend of modern civilization is against a return to normality, which would begin precisely with the restoration and recognition of aristocratic values. In practice, what we have been saying mainly concerns the form of an ideal achievement that is in a sense individual, when contingent circumstances or a special inner attitude do not lead to the inscrutable “Hermetic” type of esotericist. But the recovery of contact with a higher order of influences might also lead to the resurgence of a physical and spiritual race that has virtually disappeared

Iagla, *On the “Law of Beings”*

My brief considerations in volume I of *Introduction to Magic* (pp. 167–72), under the title “The Law of Beings,” seem to have specially attracted the attention of more than one reader. Certainly, one cannot say that the argument does not deserve it: the existence of a law of the invisible world that seems to have the same importance, the same significance, and the same generality as the physical law of the “conservation of energy” has to interest all those who are about to undertake something practical in this field. For that reason, I would like to take up the argument again and complete it with some details that are within my competence.

I wrote (pp. 169–70): “When resistance is created against the vortex of a being, [referring to the more specific instruction already given here, one can say that this must happen every time that ‘solar’ initiation is in question] the cause of an effect is produced; all the more so in the case of a magical operation. The effect is a reaction, namely, a power of the being that turns against

whoever acts or offers resistance. If the practitioner knows how to resist, the force is discharged elsewhere. But at any event, it is discharged. The ‘lines of lesser resistance’ then consist of those people who are connected through a bond of sympathy, or even of blood, with him who acts.”

The communication signed “Ermo,” which has been passed on to me and which I reproduce, is interesting because it leads to an extension of the problem: Some writings that appeared in the second volume, particularly those regarding magical chains, the solutions of rhythm and liberation, etc.

[Introduction to Magic, vol. II, 42–52, 108–14], have made me dwell again, through association of ideas, on certain aspects of occult phenomenology which had already drawn my attention; phenomena that I then had to attribute (albeit without being completely convinced) to common “chance,” not having been offered a more logical explanation up to then.

Those pages opened a sudden crack through which some light shone on a dark zone of subconscious personal experiences, which I will summarize in a few words and as clearly as I can.

The data referring to the circle of persons with whom one is linked by relationship, friendship, or familiarity, not just through interests but through shared ideals or sentiments, strong physical or moral sympathy, common tendencies—and in some other cases, ties of invincible aversion, whether justified or not—offer the esoterically minded psychologist the opportunity to make the following curious observation.

Identical or analogous happenings are often found to occur in such a circle: happy or sad circumstances that have almost equal reactions on those concerned.

Sometimes one or more persons belonging to the “circle” are affected by a happy or a sad event; while at other times when one of them is affected by a misfortune, suddenly another—as though on a rebound or through a law of equilibrium—receives some such “gift” at random, as it were. And the stronger the ties of sympathy or aversion that bind the members of the group, the more this obscure law of interdependence manifests.

I could cite particular cases with precise elements and dates, if the interest here were not rather in the general law. Readers with a good memory and a suitable power of observation may arrive at similar conclusions.

These cases have also been noticed by persons who are entirely detached from our studies; persons whose seriousness, balance, and lack of prejudice can give no motive for suspicion.

What causes should one trace for phenomena of this kind? Should one resort to the “law of Beings,” to karma, to ancestral heredities? Does it allow one to believe in the possibility of unconscious chains (magical ones)? Or should one simply attribute it to something like that law of elective affinities, displayed in Goethe’s famous novel of that name? Perhaps these problems are unimportant to the study of transcendent esotericism. But one should not deny their importance to those who are trying to understand better the backstage of what is happening

around them.

For my part, it is beyond doubt that phenomena of this kind are real, and that they do not obey mere chance.

Ermo himself offers the right key to many cases, in speaking of “unconscious chains.”

It is not only through magical operations that two or more persons can reach a state of genuine rapport, so as to form a single body, as it were, in regard to some reactions. Every time that two or more persons establish a sympathetic bond that really goes deep; or every time their lives are oriented to a unique and distinct fundamental tendency, a commonality of vibrations is produced and sets up an occult rapport of “vital forces,” automatically and without regard to spatial distance.

The individuals then find themselves in the state of “communicating vessels.” This is a real fact, which becomes established once the necessary conditions are present.

We must therefore admit that there are natural or elective chains that behave like those created by conscious magical art. This explains the phenomena to which Ermo has drawn attention. It is not rare to have the same thought, or for both to have the same memory, sensation, or association. But when the unity is deep, one may say that one “destiny” merges with the other. Whatever affects one member of the group for good or ill tends automatically to extend to the others who are united in life, and to take effect in ways that can be quite different, so that the intimate link is often elusive.

I deliberately said “united in life.” The seat of the chain’s rapport is precisely that animated something between the corporeal and the incorporeal, which esotericists call the “vital body.” It is connected with the blood. From this one can understand why consanguinity, the natural bond established by blood, is in itself a potential link in the chain. A reaction repelled by the individual, if it is very strong, forces its way, arouses the bond, which turns from potential to actual—and therefore passes to the blood relatives: unless the person in question has “electively” established and continued closer relations with others, who then become more exposed to the reaction than his relatives.

In past times the strength of the blood was much more alive than it is today.

Nowadays the mixing of races and the individualistic tendency have subverted it, dissolving the state of a natural chain that was formerly provided by the unity of family and group. In ancient traditions we can discern three principles that demonstrate the strength of this conception: the principle of diffusion, the principle of concentration, and the principle of substitution.

By virtue of the first, a “fault” (i.e., the cause of a reaction) committed by one member of the community or the family could cause its “curse” to fall on all the others: they must all expiate it. The same goes for the “offence” suffered by one member. If one can admit that cases of physical

and psychic heredity exist, it should not be too difficult to allow cases of the hereditary transmission of vital and subtle elements connected to a special influence, just as in a hereditary ailment a certain predisposition proceeds from the transmitted physical elements.

To extend the view further, the principle of diffusion can also work in time: the “curse” of a “fault” may extend over generations of the same blood, until its “expiation” is accomplished—unless the reaction has been exhausted through determined events. If instead of a “fault” it is a matter of an “offence,” there remains the legacy of the vendetta, of reparation: the “offence” against one has aroused a force in the community that must be discharged, or else it will turn into a source of disaster, a distortion of the collective or family entity. The contrary case is the diffusion among the members of a “blessing” or “benefic influence” activated by one of them.

By the principle of concentration, on the other hand, the “charge” that falls on a community or chain can be gathered and resolved by a single member, who “redeems” all the others. These are the voluntary or designated “expiators”—or else they are the “avengers.” Everyone knows how widespread this tradition was in ancient times, especially with regard to sacrifices. Often the sacrifice was presented as preventing a “diffusion”: the “curse” that fell on a community or a family through the fault of one of them was lifted from all by another individual, an expiator or redeemer. In the Judeo-Christian myth, Jesus with his sacrifice ransoms the heredity of Adam that weighed on all the descendants of the “first man.”

The principle of substitution means that an “offence” committed by or to a single member can be redeemed by another member who substitutes for the first.

One can be sacrificed for the other, one answers for the other, or one avenges the other. The effect is the same: the cause that was created is discharged.

I have recalled these ancient traditions, which refer to the state of a chain given naturally in former times by blood, because it extends to various analogous unities that can still be established today, in other ways. All the terms such as “fault,” “offence,” “blessing,” “curse,” “vengeance,” “ransom,” “redemption,” and so forth, in this context should be separated from any moral significance and understood positively as dynamisms of subtle forces, obeying the law of beings and responding to a precise determinism, which the Ancients showed that they knew and which gives a positive foundation, one might say even a physical one, to many usages and traditions that are considered barbaric or superstitious today, or have become so.

For instance, I would like to address the ancient law of vengeance. It is sheer ignorance to see in it nothing but the codification of a purely subjective fact based on instinct, passion, and impulse. On the contrary, to any chain-bound group it is a justification based on unadorned reality. The offender’s action has created a reaction, because it has broken an equilibrium. Until the reaction is exhausted, the unbalanced factor will remain in the chain, and will attract to it exactly what the offender should suffer as the effect created by his cause.

Vengeance, on the other hand, defuses the imbalance and restores the state of equilibrium. This

knowledge applies not only to chains, but also to relations between individuals, so long as a relationship “in life” has been established: if one person offends another unjustly, then either the latter, reacting, restores the unity of his energy, in which a new cause has arisen; or if he does not do so he must suffer the reaction himself, which, as “vengeance,” would have struck the former, following an inflexible law. Look deeply at the sense of disturbance and the secret of the mortal pallor which appears on his face when he is mortally offended, “in his life,” and you yourself may find the confirmation of what I have said.

But beside vengeance there is another possibility: love. Here the occult dynamic reveals a law that throws a disconcerting light on the meaning and secrecy of certain special teachings. Love, understood as the act of profound sympathy, whereby one is, as it were, identified with another person, creates a rapport in the objective sense explained above. It then creates a path for every energy in action or reaction. Every unresolved reaction tends to follow that path.

He who knows how to resist, by loving, can then guide the reactions where he will. Thus, you understand what is meant by the precept love your enemy: it is the way of projecting onto himself the reaction that he has determined.

You also understand why love is forbidden to the absolute magi—love in the pure and true sense. For love’s sake, they must not love. The legend in the East, especially in China, depicts them closed off in a terrible isolation.

I would like to touch on another point, about the “rapports” that are not natural or “elective,” but established sacramentally. Today, when the sense of so many things has been lost, one no longer knows the real, physical value that consecrations can have, for example, those of baptism or matrimony. These sacraments today are mostly only reliques, mere formalities.

In ancient times things were different: a “sacrament” was an act of power that created a “union in life.” The act of baptism or equivalent rites in other traditions acted magically on the “vital body” of the person consecrated and attached him “in life” to the trunk of a tradition: his vital force henceforth received the quality of the community and remained occultly bound to it. The act of matrimony sealed “in life” the union of two existences. The operation did not require the subject’s participation in order to be effective: his intention could also be absent (as in infant baptism), partial, or even contrary: but just like the physical body, the vital body is susceptible to suffer violence, and all that was required were the objective conditions that gave power to the rite. For once the chrismatic seal was placed on him, any infraction constituted a direct action against the collective entity that its power had established—and it imposed itself, for the same reason as explained in the case of “offence,” which he who had broken the sacrament would have to expiate: it was necessary for the cause, which would have been produced within the chain, to be eliminated. An objective, unsentimental, positive logic now appears in many ancient usages, institutions, and legislations that have been discredited or made the object of open condemnation by the modern mind, which can no longer understand them.

The major obstacle is in the repugnance felt in recognizing that there are laws in life that may to

a large extent be set in motion by the inner attitude of the soul, by its decision and its action, but which are in themselves as rigorous and objective as the laws of physics, so that like those they leave no room for the demands of sentiment, morals, or human justice.

One should consider, moreover, that in its earthly existence the soul largely lives on credit, thus it cannot presume to extract itself from what happens to that which does not depend on it, but on which in a certain respect it depends. Man as a pure "I" belongs to himself, and he alone is the cause of his destiny. But already as a mind, then as life, and then as body, man ceases to belong solely to himself, and he shares the destiny of collective entities, beside which his own action and disposition cause new and more special associations that complicate the knot with additional threads. To protest against the fact that one can respond for others, or suffer the action of others (even unknowingly), shows ignorance of these common destinies that belong to everything in man that is not his pure "I." The unjust fact of "contagious" reactions and communal happenings, to whose minor forms Erno has drawn attention, is found on a grand scale in cataclysms, epidemics, and wars. One does not usually protest, because one does not suspect that these happenings are rebounding discharges from specific causes, obeying the law of beings, that will strike a whole community without discrimination. If a man compromises his own life, he drags into the same fate either the lower or the nobler functions of his organism, which certainly were not to blame except by being parts of his body. One should think the same of the individuals who are more or less deserving, with respect to the collective destinies, once a link in a chain is established.

In physics, the law of action and reaction is based on that of the conservation of energy, which applies to every "closed system." The esoteric extension of these concepts leads to fairly disturbing realizations that are nonetheless real, such as:

What one acquires, another is fated to lose.

For one who advances, one or more go back, so that the total is always a fixed quantity.

To every divine ascent there corresponds a demonic fall.

However, one should not forget that all this concerns rapports that are not linked to intentions. In other words, it is not the case, for example, that he who rises should intend to push others down, or that he who acquires should steal.

This happens automatically, in virtue of an impersonal law. And vice versa: those who take the downward path do not know that by so doing they are opening for others the possibility of taking the upward one. Thus there is neither blame for the one, nor any merit for the other: in pure esotericism these human concepts have no more place than what they are allowed by the dynamics of material forces.

The importance is in having a total vision, grasping the simultaneity, the collective movement of all the paths, which are each its own, yet interwoven in a solidarity of actions and reactions. I can

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clarify it with a miniature example: the reaction that I have provoked, if I can resist it, discharges on others, provoking a given event in their life: now it may be that that event, of which I am the cause, can enter into the other's life just as it was needed to resolve causes latent in him, according to his free path of ascent or descent: the two paths are independent, yet one has served the other.

One should perhaps imagine a simultaneity of this sort, the same solid rapport of actions and destinies extended to an unimaginable complexity and a marvelous and magical coincidence, applied to everything—to the multitude of creatures, to their lives, their realizations—ever free yet satisfying the rigorous determinism and the nonhuman justice of the “law of beings.”

Abraxas, Knowledge of the Sacrificial Act

In order to introduce you to another formation, adaptation, and resolution of our fundamental ritual—a more severe and trenchant one—I would like to speak briefly about the mystery of the sacrifices used in Magic.

To sacrifice is to invoke, strip, dominate, transmute, in order to project—or to absorb. The operation takes as its center the body and the blood of a victim, because the forces you are dealing with are of such a nature that you should not offer yourself directly as a “magnet” and a body for their manifestation and incarnation. The ritual rhythmicizes and measures the identification: certainly you must feel in your spirit and control the forces that descend on the victim, but the integral reception should be only in the flash of the climactic moment of the kill, when the power is liberated and dominated—or projected—in a single action.

In sacrifice as in any ceremonial ritual, the key and the pivot are the purification and magical dignity of the operator. These are two conditions under which the power of consecration, imposition, and invocation is developed, or integrated, within you, which is to animate, magnetize, and enliven the ritual.

With strict abstinence, chastity, fasting, silence, isolation, and observation of all the rules that are known to you relating to spiritual and ritual purity, you must first loosen the bodily and material bonds, so that you are gradually unburdened of the dark cloud of desires, imaginations, and affections, and the solar I begins to shine in you.

Calm, free from all fear and doubt, in control of heart and mind, stopping all motions of the unstable soul and wandering thoughts, establish yourself by degrees in that I, and raise yourself to the inner light and to contemplation.

Depending on your ability, the period required will be shorter or longer: days, weeks, months. Only when you feel yourself saturated, in complete certitude and in equilibrium of the inner force with the magnetized and exalted sensibility, can you embark on the sacrificial action.

Before all else, formulate and fix firmly in your mind the goal and meaning of the action. Consider its parts.

First of all, the consecration of the victim. It is the operation through which you open it, specifying it as the receptacle and entry point of an entity or a force.

An animal, lacking the degree of closure that individuation brings to human consciousness, is by nature more prone to “intercourse.” Only a veil separates it from the primordial powers and from the demons, or gods, of life. And the custom in certain traditions of inebriating the victim is intended to give an extra push to the sacralizing work that summons these powers into it, destroying its predispositions and “impurities” and making it divine.

I know how much more you would like me to tell you. Nonetheless, what can help you here is not what is susceptible to being told. It is by seeing that you will know. You may be sure that effective knowledge is not learned for one occasion and for one particular goal: it is what is already understood in the transformed inner vision of things, without which Magic is inert and vain. When everything speaks to you in the language of a symbol, that is when you have the beginnings of expertise.

When you no longer see the earthly animal solely as an earthly animal, you will also know the direction of sympathy and efficacy for the action of the spirit (whether or not linked to a formula or a ritual) with which the complete actuality of a power is attracted and fixed in the victim’s body, which already contained it in dormant form.

Even if your consecrating virtue is complete, you do well to conform to the correspondences taught by Tradition, where every animal species is already “sacred” to a particular divinity. And when you impose a concrete goal on the sacrifice, choose for the victim that animal whose god represents the direction concordant with the nature of that goal.

However, you know that in high Magic, it is a degradation for the immediate motive to be any personal intention. The higher significance in the sacrifice is liberation, renewal of liberation, immortalization, creation. And as for the mystery, you may know it from the myths of the ancient Wisdom.

Therein you will find the doctrine about gods created by sacrifice, who derive their origin and essence from sacrifice, who exist through sacrifice or are confirmed and renovated in their mode of life. You will recognize this in many primordial myths: that the heroes or gods who fight against monsters, dragons, serpents, bulls, and other wild forces, and those forces themselves, are one and the same thing. For a force to fight against itself or even kill itself—this is the very act that makes a god. The “god” emerges from the power of chaos that reacts against itself, that shatters itself, thus freed to rise to a higher plane, making itself the principle of a law, of a power of order: thus Marduk, conqueror of Tiamat the dragon of chaos, is the cosmic regulator.

This is the meaning of the sacrifice in its universal sense and on the transcendent plane. Once you comprehend that, you can come down to the sacrificial actions of men and establish the

twofold direction in which they can be efficacious: through the sacrifice one can kindle and renew the very act that originally constituted the essence of a god, and which, through the violence done to chaos, was transformed into the “spirit” of a law of life or of nature; or else you can attract and confront forces still in the free and wild state, then by means of the sacrifice exert the dominating and transfiguring action on them.

Without falling into a lower magic, you can see for yourself that an immediate and specific realization can also result from adapting one or another of the sacrificial meanings just mentioned. For in the first case, by reproducing the spirit that constitutes a law you have the means, through placing a command in it, of dominating that law; and in the other case, when the act is the creation of a new entity, you only have to give it as its “soul” the idea of your goal. You can do all this in the instant of the kill that frees the energy from the body, strips it bare and fixes it.

In ancient times, the temples and other places consecrated to sacrifices that were regularly performed were already saturated with occult influences and virtual presences. Today, only the subtle intellect can lead you to discover the place best suited to you. If you do not have your own operating chamber, shut off from outside influences and magnetized through rituals, you had better choose open spaces among the great natural forces, on mountains or by the sea: today, when every building is infected by the fumes and rotting ferments of the human mass.

Once you know and have firmly fixed the meaning and the goal, then act.

With your mind in the Sun, and with the sign that follows and confirms the mental action, enclose yourself and the victim in a pentagram, drawn from right to left. If you have companions in the chain (and they too must first have gone through the spiritual and ritual purification), they should be arranged in an inner circle, forming a current, everything being enclosed by the interwoven rays of the pentagram.

The better you know these invocations, the greater will be their virtue of magically exalting you. Use them, placing the “direction of efficacy” in the god summoned by the ritual.

All the rest falls beyond the capacity of words: how at a given instant you feel; how after contact is established you should increase by degrees and uninterruptedly the intensity and saturation of the presence, magnetically concentrated on the victim; when the limit is reached at which the act of killing must strip and fully release the force; what are the skill, boldness, and rapidity of spirit by which you seize that force in the pure state, confronting and coercing its ambiguous and frightening nature, in the state in which the power, able to manifest destructively toward any closed circuit of the body and of matter, is absolute; how you can control, channel, and direct the efficacy of the energy transmuted and now passed into you—or the revelation of the god who works this—especially when you must make it the body of power of the imagination command of a magical projection; by what ways you fix or guide it into your own body, into the chain, into other beings, animals, or things—the “digestion” of this efficacious energy—all that can only be told by your spirit, to your spirit.

You have been told repeatedly about the internal structures of the actions and states in the instructions for Hermetic practice (Introduction to Magic, vols. I and II, *passim*).

Keep foremost in mind that the action only works when the saturation and the sense of certainty are absolute, when the rhythms coincide of themselves to produce the spark that makes a single thing of you, the victim, and the summoned demon.

I will give you some ritual details, adapted from formulae of the most ancient traditions. But avoid formalizing yourself. If you do not feel these formulae, leave them alone. They are only an outline for you. Perhaps you yourself will find and animate others of the same type.

Once the pentagram is drawn, do not move. If you have a chain inside it this will steadily accelerate the current, from left to right, raising the Sun, following our ritual. As soon as the presence or the magnetic saturation is detectable, spread your arms and declaim:

By the virtue of the sacred word that turns Earth to Fire and Water to Air—and Fire to Earth, Air to Water.

By the virtue of the power in action that unveils and strips bare.

By the force of this living current of well-being.

I (Name)

Evoke from the invisible and living world of Light,

X (Name of the God)

On the Earth, in the Earth I evoke you.

Burn this shadow, rend this shadow, conquer this shadow.

Come, come, come!

May the marvel be great,

May the force be complete,

Rapid as a thousand lightnings,

As a thousand thousand Lights!

After speaking the formula, raise the right palm, then sign the victim's head with the right thumb.

Here is one formula to follow:

As this animal is in my power, and depends on me to kill or to spare it,

Thus you depend on my power.

Your life is my life and my life is your life.

I dominate your life.

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I liberate your life.

At the moment of killing, one part of the power rises, another incarnates, and the body of its momentary incarnation is the blood spilled from the victim, which is magnetized and saturated with a supranatural magical virtue. Certain ceremonial forms, not wholly distinct from lower magic, make particular use of this blood for communion, operation, consecration.

But you had better follow the part of the force that rises to the world of the gods, which is their “food” and ambrosia, the draught of deathlessness—not that which is attracted to the world of men, and which is by nature obscure, dreadful, and difficult to control.

If you always act from the Light, fear will never get a hold over you. The moment of sacrifice was often considered as a solemn and fearful moment, and those forces that, liberated and uncontrolled, break into the world of men through the opening given to them are demonic powers of deception and malice.

In the Athenian Buphonia sacrifice, the sacrificer fled, throwing aside the ax, as though in a catastrophe—and similar things can be found in other traditions, together with rites of purification and expiation performed by those who had taken part in the sacrifice, participating in the astral vortex of which it was the center. But all this happens only when the mind is unsound, the force unready, and the spirit impure.

Among our ancient traditions I would remind you of the sacrificial actions of the builders, destined to create an entity that would remain bound to a house, a temple, or a city that was to be built, as though it were its “soul.” You see there clearly expressed the idea of the efficacy of the sacrificial operation for aeonic creation.

You can also revisit what I told you about the divinities who are personifications of “Victories” (see chapter VI.3). You can recognize in the rhythm and progression that are developed in the heroic experience the exact phases of a sacrificial action: the emergence of the “daimon” or double, then the manifestation of Nemesis and the Furies as “goddesses of battles,” then fighting and subjugation of the forces unleashed, culminating in Victory. Just as sacrificer and victim coincide here in a single being, there, as in the sacrifice, the victory can create a god, or bring one back to life. And as periodic sacrifices reproduce by analogy those which originally made up the substance of a god, they feed this same substance actuated and dominated within human consciousness. Thus, in Rome the bloody games and contests evoked divinities, but also, through an equivalent state identical in magical efficacy to the sacrifices, evoked the Victories, conceived of as entities, mystical epiphanies of which the real victories recorded in history had been only traces, signs, and symbols.

Ea, Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power

One of René Guénon’s works is dedicated to the problem of the relationship between spiritual authority and temporal power,

1 an important problem not only from the traditional but also the esoteric point of view. Since our ideas on the subject do not entirely agree with Guénon's, it seems good to explain the various reasons.

According to Guénon, every normal and traditional civilization is characterized by the primacy of spiritual authority over temporal power. As soon as temporal power emancipates itself, and especially when it claims to subjugate the spiritual authority for contingent and political goals, an involutive process begins, and the development of civilization slides steadily downward.

Eventually, the representatives of temporal power can no longer maintain their position, causing a breakdown that leads to the world of materialistic and rebellious masses.

We largely agree with all that. The divergence of our point of view begins when the problems arise, first, of the basis for the spiritual authority, and second, of those who might legitimately represent it.

For Guénon, spiritual authority is tied to "knowledge," to "contemplation," and to the priestly caste, whereas temporal power is tied to "action" and the warrior or regal caste. This is debatable. Let us state at the outset that our consideration—and Guénon's, too—is not restricted to more recent times.

Obviously in recent times (in which we include the cycle of the great European dynasties) the warrior caste has been limited to exercising temporal power, restricted to military, political, administrative, and juridical functions, and having little sacred about it. But that seems to refer less to the warrior caste itself than to its degradation. In the same epoch, that which represents itself as the priestly caste, or rather as the clergy, shows just as much degeneration from what was originally the élite of the true hieratic representatives of spiritual authority.

For now, let us consider the basis of the latter. Guénon speaks of "those principles that are the eternal and immutable essences contained in the permanent actuality of the divine Intellect" (p. 22), principles that provide "knowledge par excellence" (p. 45) and constitute the fulcrum of the "traditional doctrine," of "orthodoxy," and of the inexorable authority of the traditional castes (p. 33). Rather than principles, we prefer to speak here of higher states of being that are to be realized. As we know, the esoteric concept of "tradition" refers to a certain stabilization of those states, brought about by a chain of qualified beings. Its natural consequences are the legacy of a knowledge that is not merely human, a certain status, and a certain immaterial influence. Now, understood in this more concrete sense, one cannot see why "tradition" should be the monopoly of the priestly castes. At the origins, in a whole series of cases it was the regal tradition that had this very significance, such that it could legitimately claim the supreme authority for itself. Fragments of this ancient regal world have come down even to our own times: we could mention, for example, the Japanese tradition of divine royalty.

As we have seen, Guénon clearly distinguishes "knowledge" from "action," attributing the former to the priestly caste, the latter to the warrior caste. But on a higher plane this is a relative

distinction. Guénon himself has often emphasized that knowledge, in the metaphysical and esoteric sense, and realization (action) are inseparable. Thus, admitting that “action” is the special field of competence of the warrior caste, the possibility always remains of conceiving of it as the basis for a higher realization. We cannot see why Guénon, when dealing with the warrior caste, considers only the material kind of action, and that which serves only temporal interests and realizations. The celebration of warrior action contained in the Bhagavad Gita, for instance, opens very different perspectives: here action becomes the very path to “heaven” and to liberation. In truth, the way of that “which is only affirmed by itself, independently of any sensible support and works, as it were, invisibly” (p. 30) cannot be made the monopoly of the spiritual authority of the priestly type. Regal majesty, that blend of Olympian detachment and power that is characteristic of the true rulers, the irresistible force of command, the august and supranatural aura that surrounds the heroes and sovereigns of the traditional world—all that represents something equivalent, though realized above all on the basis of action and the nature of a kshatriya, a warrior. To limit oneself to considering the warrior or king who has descended to wielding only temporal power is as wrong as to consider the priest merely as the theologizing mediator of the divine, or the “carer of souls” as in devotional religion: a far different type from the true hieratic representative of spiritual authority.

Guénon emphasizes the fact that in the original state the two powers were not separate, but “contained in the common principle from which they emerged, and of which they represent two indivisible aspects, indissolubly bound in the unity of a synthesis that is both superior and anterior to their distinction” (p. 14).

This is an important point. But once it is recognized, namely that the original type was simultaneously “regal” and “sacerdotal,” and that these two terms were only defined in a later period of secession, why should one of the functions be further from the origin than the other, and less able to serve as the basis for an eventual reintegration of the primordial state? We would go further still: it seems to us that the unique caste corresponding to that undivided power at the origins would have had more a regal than a priestly character. Guénon himself equates that state to the “autonomous Individuals” mentioned by Lao-Tze, the svecchācārī, a word in the Hindu tradition meaning “those who can do whatever they wish,” and the beings in Islamic esotericism “who are a law unto themselves” (pp. 14–15). They are obviously the same as the Hermetic “immaterial race without a king,” which has often been mentioned in these pages. One can hardly deny that such a type would have had qualities that are more “regal” than “priestly.”

Moreover, among all peoples the most recurrent term for the divinity itself is the regal one of “Lord.” Guénon himself uses the term “King of the World” to designate the supreme centre of the primordial spiritual authority, and emphasizes (p. 137) the relationship between the metaphysical concept of the “world axis” and the symbolism of the scepter, emblem of regal dignity. We can juxtapose the Hermetic affirmation: “After God, we will honour those who offer us his image and wield the sceptre... the statues of whom are beacons of peace in the storm,” with the Upanishadic teaching, according to which the Brahman “created a higher and more perfect

form than himself, the warrior nobility, namely the warrior gods,” to which it adds “There is none superior to the warrior nobility, and that is the reason that the priest humbly venerates the warrior when the consecration of a king takes place.”

Moreover, in China no priestly caste existed: the “mandate of Heaven” was assumed directly by the emperor, whose function was enhanced with an openly magical significance: his conduct was thought to influence even the cosmic forces.

At the centre of ancient Egypt we again find a regal type, in a tradition that simultaneously has an initiatic character; a priestly dynasty did not form until a later period, at Thebes. The first kings of Rome (and later the emperors) simultaneously held the office of pontifex, and it was they who performed the *sacra* (rites).

Up to the Middle Ages what we might call the “regal mystery” was preserved; for example, in the allusions to the enigmatic “royal religion of Melchizedek,” while various orders of chivalry, especially the Templars, sought to integrate the warrior type with an ascetic, priestlike, and sometimes even initiatic dignity.

We should not forget that wherever “priesthood” is mentioned in reference to the origins, it risks a confusion of language and the diffusion of a pernicious error, because the type in question has very different traits from those that everyone thinks of today, when priests or clergy are mentioned. Let us take only the example of the Brahmin, the “sacerdotal” prototype of the ancient Indo-Aryan civilization: he appears more with the characteristics of a “magus” in the higher sense.

He is the lord of the Brahman, which was originally understood not in Vedantic terms but as a pure magical force. He is the holder of formulas and rituals, able to act even on the highest divinities. This is the field in which his “wisdom” is essentially defined. But the “magical” element, through its relation to the power of command and a virile attitude, is much closer to the warrior spirit than to the priestly in the current sense.

We cannot see how Guénon can state, as a principle, that regal initiation corresponds to the “physical” and priestly initiation to the “metaphysical,” or the former to the “Lesser Mysteries” and the latter to the “Greater Mysteries” (p.40).

On the contrary, it is documented that in the Eleusinian Mysteries, for instance, it was thought that initiation conferred on the king a dignity superior to that of the priests or sages.

The Hellenic archon, like the Roman emperor later, was assimilated to Zeus and sometimes to Heracles as “Olympian” hero.

Identical views figure in Mithraism, another example of an initiation favoring the warrior element. Thus, for royalty the initiatic point of reference, ritual or symbolic, was not the “physical” (i.e., the “natural”) order, but the “metaphysical,” the “supreworldly.” Regal majesty

always served as an image of that of the “King of Heaven.”

The problem under discussion is not of merely speculative or historical interest, but is also important from the point of view of a traditional reconstruction: that much is evident to whoever relates it to the other problem, that of East and West. The general trend of the West is far more “active” than “contemplative,” and its predominant ideal is the “warrior,” kshatriya (in the fullest possible extent of the term), rather than the “priest.” These things are obvious, and already emphasized in more than one essay of the present collection. Moreover, we do not believe that this characteristic of the West is explicable by a degenerative process: we already find it, in fact, in the most ancient Western traditions. Nor has it failed to influence the esoteric domain, too. To take a single example: while Hermetism is one of the principal Western initiatic traditions, we should note that while the Hermetic art is often called sacred, hieratic, or “divine,” its most frequent designation is that of Ars Regia, the “Royal Art.” There are also some significant variations in the symbolism of Western esoteric doctrine. Two examples: in the hierarchy of elements in the East one usually finds Fire first, then Air; but in the West, first the Air and then (in the sense of a higher dignity) the Fire. In the East, the colour white corresponds to sattva, the highest of the three gunas, while the lower guna of rajas is red; also “knowledge” is very often symbolized by the white lunar light.

The whole of the Western Hermetic tradition, and with it more than one school of magic, concurs in a reversed arrangement: the albedo or white regimen, always placed under the feminine, lunar sign, is an inferior degree to the rubedo regimen, the red, whose symbol is the royal purple and the element of Fire.

These are telling symptoms that speak of more than a casual variation of symbolic expressions: rather, they display a specific form of traditional instruction congenial to a “warrior” nature.

To underrate this arrangement by way of the thesis that the supreme authority can only be legitimately held by the priestly caste is not only unjustified but also dangerous, if one does not want to cause misunderstandings and if one considers the practical consequences. In the West, this would mean reinforcing the “Guelph” faction and flattering it with the pretense that the Christian or Catholic clergy embodies the same dignity as Guénon refers to when he speaks of the “sacerdotal caste”: namely that it is right in claiming supreme spiritual authority in the Western world. This is in no way the case. One of the basic causes of Western civilization’s distress is the fact that a world essentially composed of kshatriya, warriors, has for centuries lacked a fitting “soul.” The spiritual authority of the religion that has come to predominate in the West is thoroughly “priestly” in tone, so as to cause an unhealthy dualism, or else compromises that are anything but constructive. The one and only spiritual authority that the West can obey without violence and denaturation is that which takes shape on the basis and in the framework of a kshatriya tradition. But we do not want to repeat things already said.

Instead, something should be said about the problem of decadence. Guénon seems to see its cause in the revolt of the warrior caste against the priestly caste.

The warrior caste, “after having originally been subject to the spiritual authority, rebelled against it, declaring itself independent, or even tried to subordinate that authority to itself, which it had originally always acknowledged as the foundation of its power” (p. 29).

If Guénon had simply said that decadence began with the revolt of the political power against the spiritual authority, he would have been right. But by expressing himself thus and involving the two castes, his point is contestable. A thesis of this kind in fact presupposes a hierarchical arrangement like that of the Catholic (and, what is more, Guelph) Middle Ages; or, with due reservations, of Brahmanic India in a period which, besides, was in no way that of the origins. But there have been civilizations, indisputably traditional, whose hierarchical structure was different and whose principle of decadence was equally different. For example, how could one apply this thesis to ancient China, which, as we have said, had a “celestial” royalty, not subordinate to a priestly caste, or to the ancient Nordic peoples, whose situation was analogous and whose king was legitimized simply through his quality of being of the blood of the “Ases”? In other cases we have the opposite; there are cases in which the setting up of a priestly caste against sacred royalty marked the beginning of a subversion and of decadence. Such was the case, for example, in ancient Egypt and, to an extent, in ancient Persia. For our part, we prefer to generalize by saying that in a whole cycle of civilization derived from the Hyperborean and distinguished by the polar symbol, the takeover of a “priestly” spirituality represented a disintegration and the effect of outside influences, linked to the cycle of the Demetric-matriarchal civilizations of the South.

Our thesis is thus that the primacy or predominance of a warrior or regal tradition over a clergy or a priesthood, like the primacy of action over knowledge, does not by itself constitute any lowering of level or involution. That comes from the loss of contact with metaphysical reality, whether that loss occurs when the sacral and initiatic concept of regality materializes into a merely temporal and political function; or else when the original priestly function degenerates into ecclesiastical and clerical survivals, opaque dogmatic forms, and relationships of simple devotional religiosity.

In one form or another, decadence has for some time been at work in the Western world. The first condition for an effective reaction would be to reestablish contacts with metaphysical reality. But barring some unpredictable general mutation, that seems more problematic than ever.

The Problem of Decadence

Whoever rejects the myth of progressivism and of evolutionism, which is nowadays generally taken for granted; whoever, through an interpretation deriving from higher values of at least the most recent history, comes to ascertain that regression is the meaning of this history—such a one shall find himself standing before the “problem of decadence.” If evolution rests on a logical impossibility—since more cannot derive from less, nor the superior from the inferior—an analogous difficulty seems to introduce itself in any attempt to explain this modern regression.

Spiritual Virility

How is it possible that the superior might degenerate, that a given level of spirituality and of civilization might be lost? The solution would not be difficult if one could rest content with simple analogies: the healthy man might grow ill; the virtuous can become vicious; by a natural law, which arouses surprise in no one, every organism, after its birth, its development, and the fullness of its life, grows old, grows weak, dies. But this is an observation, not an explanation—even supposing that between the two orders there exists a complete analogy, which is dubious enough given that one is dealing here with civilizations and politico-social organizations, in which human will and human liberty play a very different role than in the naturalistic phenomena we have mentioned.

However, this objection comes up against the theory of Oswald Spengler, who employs precisely the analogy offered by these organic facts. He assumes that, just as each organism, each civilization has its dawn, its phase of full unfolding, then an autumnal aging, a sclerosis, and, finally, death and dissolution.

The cycle proceeds from the originating organic, spiritual and heroic forms of what Spengler calls *Kultur*, to the materialized, inorganic, massified and disanimated forms of what he calls *Civilisation*. Such a theory repeats in part another theory of traditional character regarding the so-called “cyclical laws.” These refer, moreover, to a considerably vaster realm, one might even say a metaphysical realm, which is capable of carrying us a little deeper in the analysis of our problem. It offers, effectively, the beginning of an explanation as to why one must here refer to the manifestation of a force which little by little exhausts itself—just as the pumping force of a piston (to use a banal but meet image), which provokes an expansive movement that gradually slows and recedes unless a new input arrives (an input which would give rise, in our case, to a new cycle).

We must specify that on the plane of human reality the form in question should be understood as a superior organizing force which binds the inferior forces, imprinting them with form. When the originating tension weakens these lower forces release and gradually gain the upper hand, making way for phenomena of a disintegrating character.

This view appears to be relevant for that specific framework within which we would like to limit the problem of decadence. Its point of departure, similar in part to Spengler's, is a dualism of the types of civilization, and consequently also of State. On one hand there are the traditional civilizations, differing amongst themselves in form and in everything contingent, but identical in their principle: these are civilizations in which spiritual and super-individual forces and values constitute the axis and the supreme point of reference for the general organization, for the formation and for the justification of every subordinate reality.

On the other hand there is civilization of the modern type, identical to anti tradition, built of merely human, terrestrial, individualistic and collectivistic works and factors; it is the complete development of everything that a life disassociated from overlife might attain.

And decadence appears as the meaning of history, due to the fact that one ascertains in this

history the failure of civilizations of the traditional kind, and the ever more precise, general, planetary advent of a new common civilization of the “modern” kind.

The specific problem, therefore, is how such a thing is possible. Let us restrict the field of our inquiry yet again; let us consider that which has real bearing on hierarchical structure and on the principle of authority, since, at bottom, this constitutes the key to everything else. In the case of traditional hierarchies and of that formative action which we have just introduced in reference to cyclical laws, we must contest the idea that the fundamental and exclusive factor of these hierarchies was a species of imposition, of direct control and violent dominion, on the part of those who at least believed themselves superior over that which was inferior. One must grant an essential weight to spiritual action. Thus traditionally one could speak of “acting without acting,” one used the symbolism of the “unmoved mover” (in the Aristotelian sense) and of the “pole”—the immutable axis around which every ordering motion of the subject forces is performed. The “Olympian” attribute of true authority and sovereignty was underlined, its way of directly affirming itself, not by violence but by presence.

At times, finally, the image of the magnet was used, which, as we shall see, provides the key to all the problems presently under examination. The conception of the violent origin of every hierarchical and civil order, which is dear to the historiography and the ideology of the left, should be rejected, being as it is primitive, false, or at least incomplete.

In general it is absurd to believe that the representatives of a true spiritual authority and of the tradition, who had some direct interest in creating and maintaining those hierarchical relations by virtue of which they could appear even visibly as the masters, set about running after men to grab them and to tie each one to his post. Not simply submission, but adhesion and recognition on the part of the inferior are rather the fundamental basis of every normal and traditional hierarchy. It is not the superior who has need of the inferior, but the inferior who has need of the superior; it is not the master that has need of the minion, it is the minion that has need of a master.

The essence of hierarchy is to be found in the fact that in certain beings there lives, in the form of presence and of actuated reality, that which exists in others only as confused aspiration, as presentiment, as tendency; for this, the latter are fatally attracted by the former, naturally subordinate themselves to the former, subordinating themselves less to something exterior than to their own truest “I.” Here we can find the secret of every readiness in sacrifice, every lucid heroism, every free virile devotion within the world of the ancient hierarchies—and, on the other hand, we can find here also the origin of a prestige, of an authority, of a calm potency and of an influence, which not even the best-armed tyrant could ever guarantee to himself.

The recognition of this fact sheds a different light not only on the problem of decadence but also on the possibility, in general, of every subversive revolution.

Has one not perhaps heard it repeated that, if a revolution triumphs, it is sign that the ancient masters were enfeebled and the ancient ruling classes were degenerate? That might be true, but it is ex parte. One should certainly keep such an idea in mind, for example, wherever there are wild dogs at the chain which end up biting someone: this evidently would prove that the hands which hold these animals firm are not, or are no longer, strong enough. But things stand otherwise if one contests the exclusively violent origin of the true State, when the point of departure is that hierarchy whose most essential foundation we have just now indicated. Such a hierarchy can be overthrown in one case alone: when the individual degenerates, when he uses his fundamental liberty to deprive his life of every higher reference and to constitute himself to himself almost as if he were a lump of flesh. Then the points of contact are fatally interrupted, the tension slackens which unified the traditional organization and made the political process into the counterpart of a process of elevation and of integration of the single individual, of the realization of latent higher possibilities; then every force vacillates in its orbit, and finally—perhaps after a vain attempt to substitute the lost tradition with rationalistic or utilitarian constructs—flies free. The apices might even remain pure and intact on high, but the rest, which hung before as if suspended from them, shall now be like an avalanche. With a motion at first imperceptible, then growing in speed, it loses its stability and precipitates down, to the bottom, to the levelling of the valleys: liberalism, socialism, collectivism en masse, communism.

This is the mystery of decadence in the restricted compass to which we have limited our reflections; this is the mystery of every subversive revolution. The revolutionary commences by killing the hierarchy in himself, mutilating in himself those possibilities which correspond to the interior foundation of order—and he then proceeds to demolish the order outside himself as well. Without a preliminary interior destruction no revolution—in the sense of anti-hierarchical and anti-traditional subversion—can be possible. And since this preliminary phase escapes the notice of the superficial observer and of the myope who does not know how to see or evaluate anything but “facts,” so one is accustomed to considering revolutions as irrational phenomena, or to explaining them exclusively by material or social considerations, which in any normal civilization have never been anything but secondary and subordinate.

When the Catholic mythology, speaking of the primordial fall of man and the very “revolt of the angels,” relates all this to freedom of the will, at bottom this carries us back to the same explanatory principle. One treats of the fearful power inherent in man to use his liberty toward spiritual destruction, toward repulsion of all that which might guarantee him a higher dignity. This is a metaphysical decision; and the current which snakes throughout history in the various forms of the anti-traditional, revolutionary, individualistic, humanistic, secularistic, and in the end “modern” spirit, is nothing but the manifestation, and so to speak the phenomenology, of this decision. This decision is the primary effective and determinate cause in the mystery of decadence and of the destruction of the traditional.

In comprehending this, we are near to penetrating the sense of ancient traditions, whose nature is sufficiently enigmatic, relative to those masters who, in a certain sense, still exist, not ever

having ceased to be, and who can be rediscovered (they themselves, or else their “abodes”) by means of actions described in various ways but always symbolically; the search for them is equivalent in fact to reintegrating oneself, creating a given attitude, whose virtue is analogous to those essential qualities by which a given metal immediately feels (so to speak) the magnet, discovers the magnet and orients itself and moves irresistibly toward it. We limit ourselves to this hint, for whomever wishes to develop it.

But looking to our present times a profound pessimism arises in this connection. Even were such true masters to appear today, they would not be recognized unless they concealed their quality, and presented themselves essentially as a species of demagogues and agitators of social myths. It is for this too that the epoch of the monarchies has closed, when previously, while order subsisted, even a simple symbol might have sufficed; it was not necessary that he who incarnated this symbol was always up to its height.

Potency and Infantilism

Werner Sombart is an author worthy of more study than he is generally afforded.

One could draw from Sombart the example of a serious method of investigation into socio-economic phenomena which is distant from partiality and from the deformations of materialistic, and especially Marxist, sociology. For Sombart, economic life itself is composed of a body and a soul. There exists, that is, an economic spirit distinct from the forms of production, distribution and organization; this spirit varies so as to give direction, sense, and foundation to these forms, differing from case to case and epoch to epoch. His work on modern capitalism stands out among his writings as a classic; in this work, Sombart has brought into relief precisely the search for the spiritual factors of economic life, and the significance that these in the end have conferred on the West.

It is not our intent here to give a framework for such research. We will instead touch upon one particular point, emphasized by Sombart in a book which has been published also in Italian.

We are speaking of the form that the economic process has assumed in the period of high capitalism; we are referring therefore essentially to America. This is a development which tends toward unlimited expansion, because every stopping up or slowing down signifies falling behind or being crushed. The immediate and natural ends of the productive process become subordinate. *Fiat productio et pereat homo!* And this process, from which the capitalistic entrepreneur cannot any longer detach himself, seizes him soul and body; he comes to love it, to want it in and of itself, for it begins to constitute the very sense of his existence; he “does not have time” for anything else. We find here a type therefore which no longer even asks itself why it should be racing to infinity, why there should be such a febrile agitation of these chain-like structures which drag the masses along and dictate laws to global politics, and in which the masters are no freer than the last of their labourers. Such a situation in the end appears natural, evident. One

believes that the prosperity of economic life, the progress of modern civilization itself, requires it.

Sombart holds however that such a state of things would never have been consolidated if certain internal factors in the current epoch had not gained the upper hand. These factors belong to the infantile psyche more than to that of a true man; for which the soul hidden by this entire process is, at bottom, nothing but a regression. He indicates the correspondences through certain characteristic points.

In the first place, Sombart speaks of the splendour exuded by all that which is great in the sense of material grandiosity, of the gigantic, of great quantity. The fascination that this exercises on the child is no different from that which it typically has also exerted on the great entrepreneurs of an Americanized economy. In general, the tendency, as Bryce says, “to mistake bigness for greatness”—that is, to confound true, interior greatness, with external greatness—has become the insignia of an entire civilization. The which is nothing if it is not primitivism.

In the last analysis, the very mania for records in every field leads us back to the same point: it is the search for something which in tangible, measurable terms, that is in merely quantitative terms, beats something else, without regard for any other subtler factor or characteristic. At the same time this is, according to Sombart, one of the forms in which we can perceive another infantile characteristic—pleasure in the speed of things, from the spinning top to the carousel. This pleasure changes plane and proportion, but in intensifying and multiplying itself in the world of technology and in many other spheres of materialized modern life, it never loses its original puerile character.

In the third place, we must consider the love of novelty. As the child is immediately attracted to whatever presents itself as new, as he immediately abandons the toy he knows and is carried away by another, leaving halfway one thing when another attracts him, similarly modern man is attracted by novelty as such, by all that which has the character of something never before seen. The sensation reduces itself, in essence, to the impression that one feels in seeing a novelty. But precisely the avidity for this sensation is one of the most characteristic traits of the current epoch.

Finally comes, according to Sombart, the feeling of power, in situations which would be referred to by psychoanalysis as “overcompensation.” This is the joy, again basically puerile, which one experiences in feeling oneself superior to others on an entirely external plane. Our author quite justly remarks, “Analyzing this sentiment, one verifies that, at bottom, it is nothing other than an involuntary and unconscious confession of weakness: for the which it constitutes also one of the attributes of the infantile soul. A man who is truly great, naturally and internally, never attributes a special value to exterior power.” Sombart here considers a yet wider sphere, and his considerations are worth reporting. “A capitalistic entrepreneur,” he says, “who commands ten thousand men and enjoys this power resembles a child, happy to see his dog obey his smallest gesture. And when it is no longer money or any exterior constraint which assures us direct power over men, we feel proud to have subjugated the elements of nature. From which the joy that

‘great’ inventions or discoveries provoke in us.” Our author adds, “A man gifted with profound and elevated sentiments, a truly great generation engrossed with the gravest problems of the human soul, does not feel itself enlarged for the success of some technological invention. It attributes nothing but a secondary importance to these instruments of external power. Yet our epoch, inaccessible to whatever is truly great, does not appreciate anything at all but this external power, rejoices in it like a child and dedicates a true cult to whomever possesses it. Here is the reason why the inventors and the millionaires inspire an unlimited admiration in the masses.” These factors, as is evident, have efficacy in the modern world generally. Yet they take particular manifestations in the economic-productive field which, at bottom, constitutes their point of departure. And it is easy to follow their development not only in the sphere of the great capitalistic structures, but also beyond them, when one tends to confer to the very State the degrading character of a species of trust, of a pure centralized system of work and of production which must continue to the bitter end.

As for these last considerations of Sombart, it goes without saying that they would be badly understood if one interpreted them as some attack, in the name of an abstract idealism, on the ideas of activity and of human affirmation in general. It is not activity which one attacks, but agitation; not true affirmation, but mistaken affirmation. There is a limit, beyond which a man who is turned exclusively toward the external loses all control over the forces and the processes to which he has given life; and then he finds himself standing before an apparatus over which he might exercise a certain power of direction only by remaining chained to it and enlarging his dependency on it day by day, simultaneously as he entangles the masses and, in the end, even certain nations in its vortex-like, chain-like motion. That which Sombart has called the “economic era” has precisely this sense.

It is worth adding that, so far as power in particular goes, there might exist a power which can be reduced neither to external greatness nor to “records,” which does not aim at matter and at quantity, but which presents itself as sign and sigil of an interior greatness, of an effective superiority. We of today seem ever more to misplace the tracks of such a power—nay, even the very notion of it. One might rediscover it, perhaps, precisely when one looks in the first place toward the internal, when one desists in this agitation, this fever to get ever beyond without a precise sense of where or why, without a precise sense of what is truly worthy of human effort and what is not worthy of it. Perhaps at such a point as that, everything which modern man has created will discover one that can truly dominate it—even if today the paths by which we might reach such an end remain yet inscrutable.

The Active Nihilism of Nietzsche

We can now return to the problem that really interests us. In all the critical situations treated up to now, their predominant trait is that of being the objects, indeed the victims, of the destructive

processes set in motion: processes which are simply suffered by current humanity. This holds good both for those who have adapted to a life based on nothing and lacking any true direction, helping themselves with a system of anesthetics and surrogates, and eventually resorting to the surviving forms of a secure bourgeois existence, and for those who feel the existential crisis of modern man in all of their being, and are consequently driven toward the kinds of revolt or risky existence that were mentioned above.

This applies, therefore, to the vast majority of our contemporaries.

In contrast, there is a different and much smaller category of modern men who, instead of submitting to the nihilist processes, seek to accept them actively. In particular, there are those who not only admit that the processes of dissolution are irreversible and that there is no going back, but who would not want to follow that path even if it existed.

They willingly accept their condition of being without support or roots.

Then the problem arises of how far the negative can be transformed into something positive.

To someone who has the necessary character to assume such an attitude, the possibility opens of a new interpretation of the adventure of mankind wanting to be free, and of the crisis that is the consequence of this adventure. Thus arises the idea of a trial, and of destructions that are simply the consequence of not being equal to it, or as one might say, not being equal to one's own action. Those who are interested may recall the ancient myths concerning an audacious sacrilege in which it is not the sacrilege in itself that brings about the ruin of some symbolic personage, but lack of the necessary dignity or strength to accomplish an act that frees one from the divine bonds.

The special human type who concerns us here and who partially fits the category in question may adopt the same point of view. As we recall, his differentiated character consists in facing the problems of modern man without being a "modern man" himself; he belongs to a different world and preserves within himself a different existential dimension.

Unlike the others, his problem is not the dramatic search for a basis (in principle, he already possesses one), but that of his own expression and confirmation in the modern epoch, in his life here and now.

With this human type in mind, let us examine the theme of "positive nihilism," or, if one prefers, the transition to the post-nihilist stage. Since it is better to do so from a standpoint inside the modern world, rather than outside it, we can take as a provisional basis some of Nietzsche's fundamental ideas, to test their solidity. We may find, in fact, that the more recent exponents of modern thought have gone little further than Nietzsche in their search for a new meaning of life, despite all that is inconsistent and negative in his philosophy.

Nietzsche considered himself “the first perfect nihilist in Europe, because he has already overcome nihilism, having lived it in his soul— having it behind himself, beneath himself, outside himself.”¹ Having seen that “nihilism is the final, logical conclusion of our great values and ideals,” and having asserted that “we must pass through this nihilism in order to grasp the true nature of the ‘values’ of the past,”² he nevertheless considered nihilism as “a pathological, transitional stage”³ and proclaimed the “counter-movement” that was destined to supplant it, without giving up the ground already won.

Nietzsche showed that the point at which one realizes that “God is dead,” that the whole world of “spirit,” of good and evil, is only an illusion, and that the only true world is that which was negated or rejected in the name of the former, is the crux of a decisive test. “The weak shatter, the strong destroy what does not shatter them, while those stronger still go beyond the values that once served them.”⁴

Nietzsche calls this the “tragic phase” of nihilism, which leads to a reversal of perspectives; nihilism at this point appears as a sign of strength, signifying “that the power to create, to will, has developed far enough that one has no further need for this general interpretation (of existence), of this introduction of a meaning (into it).”⁵ “It is a measure of one’s strength of will to know how far one can do without a meaning to things, how far one can bear to live in a meaningless world: for then one will organize part of it.”⁶

Nietzsche calls this positive pessimism, or “the pessimism of strength,”⁷ and makes it the premise of a higher ethic. “If at first man needed a god, now he is thrilled with a universal, godless disorder, with a world of chance, where the fearful, the ambiguous, and the seductive are part of his very existence.” In this world once again made “pure” and uniquely itself he stands erect, “conqueror of God and of nothingness.”⁸ The problem of the meaning of life is thus resolved with the affirmation that life is and can be a value in itself.

This brings us to the precise point made above. The significance of all the crises of recent times can be summarized as follows: a man wanted to be free, for whom a life of freedom could spell only ruin. To say “God is dead” is only an emotional way of stating the basic fact of the epoch. But Nietzsche himself remarks that having “killed God, wasn’t that perhaps rather too grand of us? Shouldn’t we become gods in order to be worthy of it?”⁹

After recognizing that “nothing exists, all is permitted,”¹⁰ and the “freedom of the spirit,” the inevitable consequence is the challenge: “Now prove the nobility of your nature.”

A famous passage of Zarathustra gives the most pregnant formulation to the essence of the crisis. “You call yourself free? Let me hear your ruling thoughts, and not that you have escaped bondage. Are you one who deserved to escape from it? There are many who threw away their only worth when they threw away their servitude. Free from what? Why should Zarathustra care? Your eyes should answer plainly: free for what?”¹¹ And Zarathustra warns that it will be terrible to be alone, without any laws from above oneself, alone with one’s own freedom in a desert

place and an icy air, judge and avenger of one's own law.

For him who only acquires any worth by serving, for him who had in his bonds not a cause of paralysis but a support, solitude appears as a curse; he loses courage and his initial pride deflates. These are the sentiments, continues Zarathustra, that then assail the free man, and that will not fail to kill him if he does not kill them first. In precise terms, and from a higher point of view, this is the essential ground of modern man's unhappiness.

Dostoyevsky points out the same thing in analogous fashion: it is Kirilov's doctrine. The framework is identical: "Man only invented God so that he could live without killing himself. And this is the history of mankind from its origins up to the present day," says Kirilov.¹²

The implication is plain: it is a necessity for man to have a center, a basic value. When he did not find it within himself, he placed it outside himself, projecting it onto God, whom he supposed to exist, certainly, but incarnated in an "other," and faith in this other provisionally solved the existential problem. Naturally this is not really, as Kirilov says, the whole meaning of the history of mankind; it is only that of the devotional phase of a theistic religion, a phase that already represents a dis integration of the world of Tradition and precedes the critical point of metaphysical breakdown of which I have spoken.

The eyes of the "free man" Kirilov are open: "I don't want to believe. I know that God doesn't exist, and can't exist." The consequence is therefore "If God does not exist, I am God.... To recognize that there is no God and not to recognize at the same time that one has become God is an absurdity and an incongruity, because otherwise one would not fail to kill one self." One can dispense with the suicide that is an obsession of Kirilov's lucid folly, and speak simply of breakdown, disintegration, becoming lost in meaninglessness.

In the face of this situation, terror and anguish arise: "He's like a wretch who has received a legacy but takes fright and won't set his hand to it, because he doesn't think himself worthy of it."

We should not take seriously the act with which Kirilov thinks he can destroy his terror in the face of the divine legacy that he should accept, demonstrating at the same time "his divinity." And we can set aside all this emphatic talk of God and being God, for the real problem posed here is one of values, and of "being free for what?"

Nothing better characterizes failure in the crucial test, the negative result of the nihilistic experience, than the sentiment expressed by Sartre in these words: "We are condemned to be free."¹³ Man takes absolute freedom for himself, but he can only feel this freedom as a condemnation. Metaphysical anguish is its counterpart.

Later we shall examine the specific themes of existentialism. For now, we shall see what can be

retained of Nietzsche's views, not as a nihilist but as one who thought that he had left nihilism behind him, and thus created the premises for a higher existence and a new state of health.

Once the idols have fallen, good and evil have been surpassed, along with all the surrogates of the old God, and the mist has lifted from one's eyes, nothing is left to Nietzsche but "this world," life, the body; he remains "faithful to the earth." Thereupon, as we know, the theme of the superman appears. "God is dead, now we want the superman to come."¹⁴ The superman will be the meaning of the earth, the justification of existence. Man is "a bridge, not a goal," "a rope stretched between the brute and the superman, a rope stretched above an abyss."¹⁵ This is not the place for a deep analysis of the manifold and divergent themes that crystallize in Nietzsche's work around this central motif. The essential can be spelled out as follows.

The negative, destructive phase of Nietzsche's thought ends with the affirmation of immanence: all transcendent values, systems of ends and of higher truths, are interpreted as functions of life. In its turn, the essence of life—and more generally of nature—is the will to power.

The superman is also defined as a function of the will to power and domination. One can see from this that Nietzsche's nihilism stops half way. It sets up a new table of values, including a good and an evil.

It presents a new ideal with dogmatic affirmation, whereas in reality this ideal is only one of many that could take shape in "life," and which is not in fact justified in and of itself, without a particular choice and without faith in it.

The fact that the fixed point of reference set up beyond nihilism lacks a true foundation so long as one insists on pure immanence is already apparent in the part of Nietzsche's thought that deals with historical criticism and sociology. The entire world of "higher" values is interpreted there as reflecting a "decadence." But at the same time these values are seen as the weapons of a hidden will to power on the part of a certain human group, which has used them to hamper another group whose life and ideals resemble those of the superman. The instinct of decadence itself is then presented as a special variety of the will to power. Now, it is obvious that in function of a mere will to power, all distinctions vanish: there are no more super men or sheep-men, neither affirmers nor negators of life. There is only a variety of techniques, of means (far from being reducible to sheer physical force), tending to make one human class or another prevail; means that are indiscriminately called good in proportion to their success. If in life and the history of civilization there exist phases of rise and decline, phases of creation and destruction and decadence, what authorizes us to ascribe value to one rather than to the others? Why should decadence be an evil? It is all life, and all justifiable in terms of life, if this is truly taken in its irrational, naked reality, outside any theology or teleology, as Nietzsche would have wished. Even "anti nature" and "violence against life" enter into it. Once again, all firm ground gives way.

Nietzsche moreover wanted to restore its "innocence" to becoming by freeing it from all finality and intentionality, so as to free man and let him walk on his own feet—the same Nietzsche who

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had justly criticized and rejected evolutionism and Darwinism because he could see that the higher figures and types of life are only sporadic and fortuitous cases.¹⁶ They are positions that man gains only in order to lose them, and they create no continuity because they consist of beings who are more than usually exposed to danger and destruction.

The philosopher himself ends with a finalistic concession when, in order to give meaning to present-day humanity, he proposes the hypothetical future man in the guise of the superman: a goal worth dedicating oneself to, and even sacrificing oneself and dying for.

Mutatis mutandis, things here are not very different from the Marxist-communist eschatology, in which the mirage of a future human condition after the worldwide revolution serves to give meaning to everything inflicted on the man of today in the areas controlled by this ideology. This is a flagrant contradiction of the demands of a life that is its own meaning. The second point is that the pure affirmation of life does not necessarily coincide with the will to power in the strict, qualitative sense, nor with the affirmation of the superman.

Thus Nietzsche's solution is only a pseudo-solution. A true nihilism does not spare even the doctrine of the superman. What is left, if one wants to be radical and follow a line of strict coherence, and what we can accept in our investigations, is the idea that Nietzsche expressed through the symbol of the eternal return. It is the affirmation, now truly unconditional, of all that is and of all that one is, of one's own nature and one's own situation. It is the attitude of one whose self-affirmation and self-identity come from the very roots of his being; who is not scared but exalted by the prospect that for an indefinite repetition of identical cosmic cycles he has been what he is, and will be again, innumerable times. Naturally we are dealing with nothing more than a myth, which has the simple, pragmatic value of a test of strength. But there is another view that in fact leads beyond the world of becoming and toward an eternalization of the being. Nietzsche differs little from Neoplatonism when he says: "For everything to return is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being."¹⁷ And also: "To impose the character of being upon becoming is the supreme test of power."¹⁸ At its base, this leads to an opening beyond immanence unilaterally conceived, and toward the feeling that "all things have been baptized in the font of eternity and beyond good and evil."¹⁹ The same thing was taught in the world of Tradition; and it is uncontestable that a confused thirst for eternity runs through Nietzsche's works, even opening to certain momentary ecstasies. One recalls Zarathustra invoking "the joy that wills the eternity of everything, a deep eternity"²⁰ like the heavens above, "pure, profound abyss of light."²¹

The "Animal Ideal": The Sentiment of Nature

The transcendent dimension may also become active in reaction to the processes responsible for a steady erosion of many ties to nature, leading to a rootless state. It is evident, for example, that the stay-at home bourgeois lifestyle is increasingly and irreversibly affected by the progress of communication technology, opening up great expanses on land, sea, and air.

Modern life takes place ever less in a protected, self contained, qualitative, and organic environment: one is immersed in the entire world by new and rapid travel that can bring us to faraway lands and landscapes in little time. Hence, we tend toward a general cosmopolitanism as “world citizens” in a material and objective sense, not an ideological, much less a humanitarian one. At least the times of “provincialism” are over.

To see what positive effect such situations can have on the development of the differentiated and self-possessed man, it is enough to glance at the ideas of certain traditional spiritual disciplines.

In them, the metaphysical idea of the transience of earthly existence and the detachment from the world have had two characteristic expressions, whether symbolic or actual: the first in hermit life, living alone in desert or forest, the second in the wandering life, going through the world without house or home.

This second type has even occurred in some Western religious orders; ancient Buddhism had the characteristic concept of “departure,” as the start of a non-profanе existence, and in traditional Hinduism this was the last of the four stages of life. There is a significant analogy with the idea of the medieval “knight errant,” to which we might add the enigmatic and sometimes disconcerting figures of “noble travellers” whose homeland was unknown, who did not have one, or must not be asked about it.

Although our case is different from that of ascetics who remove themselves from the world, the situation of the latest technological civilization might offer the incentive for commitments of this kind. In a large city, in mass society, among the almost unreal swarming of face less beings, an essential sense of isolation or of detachment often occurs naturally, perhaps even more than in the solitude of moors and mountains. What I have hinted at concerning recent technology that annihilates distances and the planetary spread of today’s horizons, feeds inner detachment, superiority, calm transcendence, while acting and moving in the vast world: one finds oneself everywhere, yet at home nowhere.¹ In this way, the negative can again be turned into positive. The experience increasingly offered, and often imposed on our contemporaries, of going to other cities, across frontiers, even to other continents, out side the sphere of a secure existence with its peculiarities can be banal, matter- of-fact, touristic, utilitarian, and in our day almost always is.

Alternatively, it can be an integrated part of a different, liberated life, with a more profound meaning in the above-mentioned terms, but only if the proper capacity of reaction is present in oneself.

Given that the speed factor has an essential role in the modern, technical mastery of distances, a passing allusion could be made to the value of the experience of speed itself. It is well known that today it is used by many men, and even women, almost like alcohol, to obtain a physical intoxication that feeds an essentially physical I, needing distraction from unpleasant thoughts and drugging itself with strong emotions.²

Like the machine itself, some situations of speed in the technologized world can have a virtual,

symbolic, and realizable dimension, often involving risk: the greater the speed, the more it requires a superior lucidity, bringing into play a higher type of calmness and internal immobility.

In this context the intoxication of speed can even change its nature; it can pass from one plane to another and have some traits in common with the type of intoxication of which I have spoken describing the state of integrated Dionysism. If this were the proper place, I could develop this theme much further.

Returning to what was mentioned earlier, the expression “nomad of the asphalt,” although scathing, is significant of the negative and depersonalizing effect on life of the destruction of natural ties in large, modern cities. Also in this regard, I am not concerned with those forms of revolt or protest that, with the idea of defending “human values,” end up going “back to nature,” starting from the antitheses between city and nature, between “civilization” and nature. That theme already belonged to the nineteenth-century bourgeois repertory. But today it occurs in the context of what we might call the “physical” primitivization of existence.

Here is one effect of that regression, through which in the course of his “liberation” Western man has come to feel ever less as a privileged being of creation, and ever more as one of so many natural species— Even as an animal. The defining and spread of Darwinism and evolutionism were already barometric indicators of this inner attitude. But apart from the domain of theories and science, in the field of ordinary, modern life, it has manifested in terms of behaviour, giving rise to what has been called the “animal ideal,” especially referring to North America, where it was first realized.

The term applies to that ideal of biological well-being, comfort, optimistic euphoria emphasizing everything that is sheer health, youth, physical vigour, security, and material success, primitive satisfaction of hunger and sexual desire, athletic life, and so forth, whose counter part is the atrophy of every superior form of sensibility and interest. I have already treated this.³

The kind of man who is thus elevated to the summit of “modern” civilization is evidently one who has developed only the aspects through which he belongs to an animal species. It goes without saying that this idea finds its counterpart in the nihilism that underlies many of today’s predominant sociopolitical currents. Here I only want to emphasize the “back to nature” idea as an instance of the physical cult of the personality.

It is not a matter of mere forms, legitimate but banal, of organic compensation. It is no wonder that today’s man feels a need for physical reintegration, relaxation of nerves, and invigoration of the body away from the environment of large, modern cities. For this reason, natural living, the culture of the body, and even certain types of individual sport may be useful. Things appear otherwise, however, when people start to claim that some kind of spiritual factor is involved; that is, when it is thought that natural surroundings and physical strength make a man feel closer to himself than in the experiences and tensions of civilized life, and above all when it is supposed

that physical sensations of well being and comfort have any profound significance, or anything to do with human integrity considered from a higher point of view. Apart from that position, which leads to the “animal ideal” and modern naturalism, I deplore the general confusion of a “return to origins” with a return to Mother Earth and even to Nature. Although it has often been misapplied, that theological doctrine that holds that a purely natural state for man has never existed is still legitimate; at the beginning he was placed in a supra-natural state from which he has now fallen. In fact, for the true type of man, it can never be a question of those origins and that “mother” wherein the individual cannot differentiate himself from his fellow men, or even from the animals. Every return to nature is a regressive phenomenon, including any protest in the name of instinctual rights, the unconscious, the flesh, life uninhibited by the intellect, and so forth.

The man who becomes “natural” in this way has in reality become denatured.

Here I must return to an earlier point: a consequence of rejecting this view is the overcoming of the antithesis between city and nature in the behaviour that should be “natural” for the human type who concerns us. It is the attitude of him who feels in place as little in nature as in the city, for whom it is normal and honest in a higher sense to keep his distance with respect to both; he sees the need and pleasure of surrender, expatiation, and feeling in animal, physical terms as an evasion, a symptom of fatigue and internal inconsistency. The body is part of the “person” as a definite instrument of expression and action in the situation actually lived; therefore it is obvious that one must also extend to it discipline and control, in order to assure completeness of being.

This, however, has nothing to do with the cult of the physical personality, much less with the mania for sports, especially for team sports, one of today’s most vulgar and widespread opiates of the masses.

As for the “sentiment of nature,” in general, the human type that concerns us must consider nature as part of a larger and more objective whole: nature for him includes countrysides, mountains, forests, and seacoasts, but also dams, turbines, and foundries, the tentacular system of ladders and cranes of a great modern port or a complex of functional skyscrapers. This is the space for a higher freedom. He remains free and self-aware before both types of nature—being no less secure in the middle of a steppe or on an alpine peak than amid Western city nightlife.

The counterpart of the “animal ideal” occurs when the sentiment of nature and landscape is made banal. This was already the case with idyllic nature, which was made into a myth in the period of the Encyclopedic and by Rousseau. Later, along these lines, there was the nature beloved by the bourgeois: Arcadian or lyric nature characterized by beauty and grace, by the picturesque, the restful, by that which inspires “noble sentiments”; nature with its brooks and groves, the romance of sunset and the pathos of moonlight; nature to which one declaims verses, weaves idylls, and evokes the poets who speak of “beautiful souls.” Though sublimated and dignified, the mood immortalized by Beethoven’s *Pastorale* is no different.

In the end, the phase of nature for the plebeians arrives, with the breakout of the masses, the

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common people everywhere with or without their automobiles, the travel agencies, the dopolavori, and all the rest; nothing is spared. The naturists and nudists form the extreme of this phenomenon.

The beaches—teeming insect-like with thousands and thousands of male and female bodies, offering to the glance an insipid, almost complete nudity—are another symptom. Still another is the assault on the mountains by cable cars, funiculars, chair lifts, and ski lifts. All this is part of the regime of final disintegration of our epoch.

There is no point in dwelling on it.

I prefer to clarify the function that authentic contact with nature can have for the active, impersonal attitude, starting with some notions along the lines of the Neue Sachlichkeit, which can only acquire a full significance in our differentiated human type.

Matzke said of this: “Nature is the great realm of things, which demands nothing of us, which neither pursues us nor asks for sentimental reactions, which stands mutely before us as a world to itself, external and alien. This is exactly what we need... this reality, always grand and distant, resting in itself, beyond all the little joys and the little sorrows of man. A world of objects, enclosed in itself, in which we ourselves feel like an object.

Completely detached from everything merely subjective, from every personal vanity and nullity: this is what nature is for us.”⁵

It is a question of restoring to nature—to space, to things, to landscape—those characteristics of distance and foreignness to mankind that were hidden in the epoch of individualism, when man projected his feelings, his passions, his lyrical ardor, onto reality to make it closer to him. It is a question of rediscovering the language of the inanimate that cannot manifest until the “soul” has ceased to impose itself on things.

This is the sense in which nature can speak to us of transcendence. Our attention automatically shifts from some principal aspects of nature to others that are more propitious for opening us up to the nonhuman and the non-individual. Nietzsche also spoke of the “superiority” of the inorganic world, calling it “spirituality without individuality.” For a “supreme clarification of existence” he refers as an analogy to the “pure atmosphere of the Alps and ice fields, where there are no more clouds or veils, where the elementary qualities of things are revealed naked and uncompromising but with absolute intelligibility” and one hears “the immense, ciphered language of existence,” “the doctrine of becoming made stone.”⁶ To return the world to a calm, stable, clear, and cool state; to restore to it its elementarity, its self-contained grandeur—this was also said to be the demand of the “new objectivity.” Here prominence was justly given not to insensibility, but to a different kind of sensibility. Also for us, it is a matter of a human type whom nature no longer interests by offering him what is “artistic,” rare, characteristic; he who no longer seeks in nature the “beauty” that merely feeds confused nostalgias and speaks to fantasy.

For this human type, there can be no landscape more beautiful than another, but some landscapes can be more distant, boundless, calm, cool, harsh, and primordial than others. He hears the language of things of the world not among trees, brooks, beautiful gardens, before oleographic sunsets and romantic moon light, but rather in deserts, rocks, steppes, glaciers, murky Nordic fjords, the implacable, tropical sun, great ocean currents—in fact, in everything primordial and inaccessible.

It naturally follows that the man with this sentiment of nature relates to it more actively—almost by absorbing its own pure, perceived force—than in a vague, lax, and rambling contemplation.

If for the bourgeois generation nature was a kind of idyllic Sunday interlude of small-town life, and if for the latest generation it is the stage for acting out its vacuous, invasive, and contaminating vulgarity, it is for our differentiated man a school of objectivity and distance; it is something fundamental in his sense of existence, exhibiting an absolute character. At this point one can clearly speak of a nature that in its elementarity is the great world where the stone and steel panoramas of the metropolis, the endless avenues, the functional complexes of industrial areas are on the same level, for example, as great, solitary forests as symbols of a fundamental austerity, objectivity, and impersonality.

With regard to the problems of inner orientation in our epoch, I have always valued ideas present in traditional esoteric doctrines. This also applies to what I have just said. The liberation of nature from the human, the access to it through the language of silence and the inanimate seems congenial to one who would turn the objective, destructive processes of the modern world to his own advantage. But the direction is no different from that which schools of traditional wisdom, like Zen, knew through a real cleansing and transparency of the glance or an opening of the eye, an enlightening revelation of the consciousness that has over come the fetters of the physical I, of the person, and his values.

The result here is an experience that already belongs to a different level from that of ordinary consciousness. It does not exactly concern the matter of this book, but it is still interesting to point out its relation ship with the vision of the world centred on free immanence, which was mentioned in an earlier chapter (in which a fleeting allusion to Zen itself was made) and which I now reconsider as the limit of a new realism.

Ancient tradition has a saying: “The infinitely distant is the return.” Among the maxims of Zen that point in the same direction is the statement that the “great revelation,” acquired through a series of mental and spiritual crises, consists in the recognition that “no one and nothing ‘extraordinary’ exists in the beyond”; only the real exists.

Reality is, however, lived in a state in which “there is no subject of the experience nor any object that is experienced,” and under the sign of a type of absolute presence, “the immanent making itself transcendent and the transcendent immanent.” The teaching is that at the point at which one

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seeks the Way, one finds oneself further from it, the same being valid for the perfection and “realization” of the self. The cedar in the courtyard, a cloud casting its shadow on the hills, falling rain, a flower in bloom, the monotonous sound of waves: all these “natural” and banal facts can suggest absolute illumination, the satori. As mere facts they are without meaning, finality, or intention, but as such they have an absolute meaning. Reality appears this way, in the pure state of “things being as they are.” The moral counterpart is indicated in sayings such as: “The pure and immaculate ascetic does not enter nirvana, and the monk who breaks the rules does not go to hell,” or: “You have no liberation to seek from bonds, because you have never been bound.”⁷ The extent that these peaks of the inner life can be attained, in the framework already indicated, remains undetermined. I merely wish to point out a convergence of themes and a direction.

States and Parties: Apoliteia

As a result of today’s general processes of dissolution, the sociopolitical is the realm that most displays the lack of any truly legitimate structure possessing a link to higher meanings. Given this state of affairs, we must frankly recognize that the human type who concerns us must govern his own behaviour by entirely different principles from those which, in social life, would be proper to him under other circumstances.

In the present epoch, no nation-states exist that, by their nature, can claim any principle of true, inalienable authority. Furthermore, one cannot even speak of states today in the proper traditional sense. Only “representative” and administrative systems exist, in which the primary element is no longer the state, understood as an entity in itself and an incarnation of a higher idea and power, but “society,” conceived in terms of “democracy.” This background even persists in totalitarian communist regimes, which so insist on the quality of “popular democracies.” For a long time there have been no true sovereigns, monarchs by divine right capable of wielding sword and scepter, and symbols of a higher human ideal.

More than a century ago, Juan Donoso Cortés stated that no kings existed capable of proclaiming themselves as such except “by the will of the nation,” adding that, even if any had existed, they would not have been recognized. The few monarchies still surviving are notoriously impotent and empty, while the traditional nobility has lost its essential character as a political class and any existential prestige and rank along with it.

Its current representatives may still interest our contemporaries when put on the same plane as film actors and actresses, sport heroes and opera stars, and when through some private, sentimental, or scandalous chance, they serve as fodder for magazine articles.

Even outside traditional frameworks, true leaders do not exist today.

“I turned my back on the rulers when I saw what they called ruling: bartering and haggling with the rabble.... Among all the hypocrisies, this seems to me the worst: that even those who

commanded feigned the virtues of the serfs”¹—Nietzsche’s words are without exception still true of the so-called ruling class of our times.

Like the true state, the hierarchical, organic state has ceased to exist. No comparable party or movement exists, offering itself as a defender of higher ideas, to which one can unconditionally adhere and support with absolute fidelity. The present world of party politics consists only of the regime of petty politicians, who, whatever their party affiliations, are often figureheads at the service of financial, industrial, or corporate interests.

The situation has gone so far that even if parties or movements of a different type existed, they would have almost no following among the rootless masses who respond only to those who promise material advantages and “social conquests.” When striking these chords does not suffice, the only influence over the masses today—and now even more than ever—is on the plane of impassioned and subintellectual forces, which by their very nature lack any stability.

These are the forces that demagogues, popular leaders, manipulators of myths, and fabricators of “public opinion” count on. In this regard we can learn from yesterday’s regimes in Germany and Italy that positioned themselves against democracy and Marxism: that potential enthusiasm and faith that animated masses of people, even to the point of fanaticism, has completely vanished in the face of crisis, or else been transferred to new, opposing myths, replacing the preceding ones by the sole force of circumstances.

One must expect this from every collective current that lacks a dimension of depth, inasmuch as it depends on the forces I have mentioned, corresponding to the pure demos and its sovereignty—which is as much as to say, literally, “democracy.” The only realms left for any efficacious political action after the end of the old regimes are this irrational and subintellectual plane, or the other one, determined by pure material and “social” utility. As a result, even if leaders worthy of the name were to appear today—men who appealed to forces and interests of a different type, who did not promise material advantages, who demanded and imposed a severe discipline on everyone, and who did not prostitute and degrade themselves just to ensure a personal, ephemeral, revocable, and formless power—they would have almost no hold on present society. The “immortal principles” of 1789 and the rights of equality granted by absolute democracy to the atomized individual regardless of qualification or rank, and the irruption of the masses into the political structure, have effectively brought about what Walther Rathenau calls a “vertical invasion by barbarians from below.”² Consequently, the following observation of essayist Ortega y Gasset remains true: “The characteristic fact of the moment is that the mediocre soul, recognizing itself as mediocre, has the audacity to assert the right of mediocrity and impose it everywhere.”³ In the introduction I mentioned the few who by temperament and vocation still think today, in spite of everything, about the possibility of a rectifying, political action. Men among the Ruins was written with their ideological orientation in mind. But on the basis of experience we must admit the lack of the necessary premises to reach any concrete, appreciable results in a struggle of this kind. On the other hand, I have specified within these pages a human type of a different orientation, although spiritually related to those others who will fight on even

in hopeless positions. After taking stock of the situation, this type can only feel disinterested and detached from everything that is “politics” today.

His principle will become apoliteia, as it was called in ancient times.

It is important to emphasize that this principle refers essentially to the inner attitude. In the present political situation, in a climate of democracy and “socialism,” the rules of the game are such that the man in question absolutely cannot take part in it. He recognizes, as I have said before, that ideas, motives, and goals worthy of the pledge of one’s own true being do not exist today; there are no demands of which he can recognize any moral right and foundation outside that which they derive as mere facts on the empirical and profane plane. However, apoliteia, detachment, does not necessarily involve specific consequences in the field of pure and simple activity. I have already discussed the capacity to apply oneself to a given task for love of action in itself and in terms of an impersonal perfection. So, in principle, there is no reason to exclude the political realm itself as a particular case among others, since participating in it on these terms requires neither any objective value of a higher order, nor impulses that come from emotional and irrational layers of one’s own being. But if this is how one dedicates oneself to political activity, clearly all that matters is the action and the impersonal perfection in acting for its own sake. Such political activity, for one who desires it, cannot present a higher value and dignity than dedicating oneself, in the same spirit, to quite different activities:

absurd colonization projects, speculations on the stock market, science, and even—to give a drastic example—arms traffic or white slavery.

As conceived here, apoliteia creates no special presuppositions in the exterior field, not necessarily having a corollary in practical abstention. The truly detached man is not a professional and polemic outsider, nor conscientious objector, nor anarchist. Once it is established that life with its interactions does not constrain his being, he could even show the qualities of a soldier who, in order to act and accomplish a task, does not request in advance a transcendent justification and a quasi-theological assurance of the goodness of the cause.

We can speak, in these cases, of a voluntary obligation that concerns the “persona,” not the being, by which—even while one is involved—one remains isolated. I have already said that the positive overcoming of nihilism lies precisely in the fact that lack of meaning does not paralyze the action of the “persona.” In existential terms, the only exception would be the possibility of action being manipulated by some current political or social myth that regarded today’s political life as serious, significant, and important.

Apoliteia is the inner distance unassailable by this society and its “values”; it does not accept being bound by anything spiritual or moral. Once this is firm, the activities that in others would presuppose such bonds can be exercised in a different spirit. Moreover, there remains the sphere of activities that can be made to serve a higher ordained and invisible end, as when I mentioned the two aspects of impersonality and what is to be gained from some forms of modern existence.

Turning to a particular point, one can only maintain an attitude of detachment when facing the confrontation of the two factions contending for world domination today: the democratic, capitalist West and the communist East. In fact, this struggle is devoid of any meaning from a spiritual point of view.

The “West” is not an exponent of any higher ideal. Its very civilization, based on an essential negation of traditional values, presents the same destructions and nihilistic background that is evident in the Marxist and communist sphere, however different in form and degree.

I will not dwell on this, given that I have outlined a total conception of the course of history, and dismissed any illusion about the final result of that struggle for world control, in *Revolt Against the Modern World*.

Since the problem of values does not come into question, at most it presents a practical problem to the differentiated man. That certain margin of material freedom that the world of democracy still leaves for external activity to one who will not let himself be conditioned inwardly, would certainly be abolished in a communist regime.

Simply in view of that, one may take a position -against the soviet-communist system: not because one believes in some higher ideal that the rival system possesses, but for motives one might almost call basely physical.

On the other hand, one can keep in mind that for the differentiated man, having no interest in affirming and exposing himself in external life today, and his deeper life remaining invisible and out of reach, a communist system would not have the same fatal significance as for others; also an “underground front” could very well exist there. Taking sides in the present struggle for world hegemony is not a spiritual problem, but a banal, practical choice.

In any case, the general situation characterized by Nietzsche remains: “The struggle for supremacy amidst conditions that are worth nothing: this civilization of great cities, newspapers, fever, uselessness.”⁴ Such is the framework that justifies the inner imperative of apoliteia: to defend the world of being and dignity of him who feels himself belonging to a different humanity and recognizes the desert around himself.

Acting without Desire: The Causal Law

I now address a particular aspect of the attitude in question, applicable to a wider and less exclusive field: that of life seen as the field of works, activities, and achievements in which the individual deliberately takes the initiative. We are not dealing now with simple, lived experiences, but with procedures aimed at a goal. The character of the human type I have been describing must result in a certain orientation whose essence was defined in the traditional world by two basic maxims.

The first of these is to act without regard to the fruits, without being affected by the chances of success or failure, victory or defeat, winning or losing, any more than by pleasure or pain, or by

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the approval or disapproval of others. This form of action has also been called “action without desire.” The higher dimension, which is presumed to be present in oneself, manifests through the capacity to act not with less, but with more application than a normal type of man could bring to the ordinary forms of conditioned action. One can also speak here of “doing what needs to be done,” impersonally.

The necessary coexistence of the two principles is even more distinct in the second traditional maxim, which is that of “action without acting.” It is a paradoxical, Far Eastern way of describing a form of action that does not involve or stir the higher principle of “being” in itself.

Yet the latter remains the true subject of the action, giving it its primary motive force and sustaining and guiding it from beginning to end.¹

Such a line of conduct obviously refers to the domain in which one’s own nature is allowed to function, and to that which derives from the particular situation that one has actively assumed as an individual. This is the very context in which the maxims of “acting without regard to the fruits” and of “doing what needs to be done” apply. The content of such action is not what is given by initiatives that arise from the void of pure freedom; it is what is defined by one’s own natural inner law.

Whereas the Dionysian attitude mainly concerns the receptive side of the testing and confirmation of oneself while in the midst of becoming, and perhaps when facing the unexpected, the irrational, and the problematic, the orientation of which I have been speaking concerns the active side, in the specific and, in a way, external sense of personal behaviour and expression.

Another saying from the world of Tradition may apply here: “Be whole in the broken, straight in the bent.”²

I have already alluded to it when evoking a whole category of actions that are really peripheral and “passive,” which do not engage the essence but are automatic reflexes, unreflecting reactions of the sensibility. Even the supposed plenitude of pure “living,” which is largely biologically conditioned, does not belong to a much higher plane. Very different is the action that arises from the deep and in a way supra-individual core of being, in the form of “being inasmuch as one acts.” Whatever their object, one is involved in these actions. Their quality never varies, divides, or multiplies: they are a pure expression of the self, whether in the humblest work of an artisan or in precise mechanical work, in action taken in situations of danger, of command, or of controlling powerful material or social forces. Charles Péguy was only stating a principle of broad application in the world of Tradition when he said that a work well done is a reward in itself, and that the true artisan puts the same care into a work to be seen, and into one that remains unseen.

I will return to this theme in a later chapter.

A particular point that deserves to be highlighted concerns the real significance of the idea that

neither pleasure nor pain should enter as motives when one must do what must be done. It might easily make one think along the lines of a “moral stoicism,” with all the aridity and soullessness inherent in that concept. In fact, it will be difficult for someone who is acting from a basis in “life” and not from “being” to imagine the possibility of this kind of orientation, in which one obeys no abstract rule, no “duty” superimposed on the natural impulse of the individual, because his impulse would instead be to seek pleasure and avoid pain. This, however, is a commonplace derived from the false generalization of what only applies to certain situations, where pleasure and pain are rightly viewed as detached ideas, which a preliminary rational consideration transforms into goals and motives of action.

Situations of this kind are rarer than one might think in any “sane” nature (and the expression rightly applies here); there are many cases in which the starting point is not a reflection, but a vital motion that resonates as pleasure or pain as it develops. One can in fact speak of a vital “decadence” when values of hedonism and comfort take first place in one’s conduct of life. It implies a splitting and a loss of soul that are analogous to the form sexual pleasure takes for depraved and vicious types. In them, what otherwise arises naturally from the motion of eros and concludes with the possession and embrace of the woman becomes a separate end, to which the rest serves as a means.

In any case, the important thing is to make the distinction, well known to traditional teachings, between the happiness or pleasure that is ardent, and that which is heroic—using the latter term with due reservation. The distinction corresponds to that between two opposite attitudes and two opposite human types. The first type of happiness or pleasure belongs to the naturalistic plane and is marked by passivity toward the world of impulses, instincts, passions, and inclinations.

Tradition defines the basis of naturalistic existence as desire and thirst, and ardent pleasure is that which is tied to the satisfaction of desire in terms of a momentary dampening of the fire that drives life onward.

Heroic pleasure, on the other hand, is that which accompanies a decisive action that comes from “being,” from the plane superior to that of life, and in a way it blends with the special inebriation that was mentioned earlier.

The pleasure and pain that are not to be taken account of, according to the rules of pure action, are those of the first type, the naturalistic. Pure action involves the other kind of pleasure or happiness, which it would be wrong to imagine as inhabiting an arid, abstracted, and soulless climate. There, too, there can be fire and vigour, but of a very special kind, with the constant presence and transparency of the higher, calm, and detached principle—which, as I have said, is the true acting principle here. It is also important in this context not to confuse the form of action (that is, its inner significance, the mode of its validity for the I) with its content.

There is no object of ardent or passive pleasure that cannot in principle be also the object of heroic or positive pleasure, and vice versa. It is a matter of a different dimension, which includes everything but which also includes possibilities that fall outside the realm of natural, conditioned

existence. In practice, there are many cases in which this is true and possible on the sole condition of this qualitative change, this transmutation of the sensible into the hypersensible, in which we have just seen one of the principal aspects of the orientation of an integrated and rectified Dionysism.

Finally there is an analogy between positive or heroic pleasure and that which, even on the empirical plane, accompanies any action in its perfection, when its style shows a greater or lesser degree of diligence and integrity. Everyone has experienced the particular pleasure obtained from the exercise of an acquired skill, when after the necessary efforts to develop it (without being driven by the idea of “ardent pleasure”) it becomes an ability, a spontaneity of a higher order, a mastery, a sort of game. Thus all the elements considered in this paragraph complement each other.

There are some further observations to be made in a more external field: that of the interactions to which the individual is exposed, even if he is integrated in our sense, by virtue of being placed in a specific society, a civilization, and a cosmic environment.

Pure action does not mean blind action. The rule is to care nothing for the consequences to the shifting, individualistic feelings, but not in ignorance of the objective conditions that action must take into account in order to be as perfect as possible, and so as not to be doomed to failure from the start. One may not succeed: that is secondary, but it should not be owing to defective knowledge of everything concerning the conditions of efficacy, which generally comprise causality, the relations of cause to effect, and the law of concordant actions and reactions.

One can extend these ideas to help define the attitude that the integrated man should adopt on every plane, once he has done away with the current notions of good and evil. He sets himself above the moral plane not with pathos and polemics but with objectivity, hence through knowledge—the knowledge of causes and effects—and through conduct that has this knowledge as its only basis. Thus for the moral concept of “sin” he substitutes the objective one of “fault,” or more precisely “error.”³

For him who has centred himself in transcendence, the idea of “sin” has no more sense than the current and vacillating notions of good and evil, licit and illicit. All these notions are burnt out of him and cannot spiritually germinate again. One might say that they have been divested of their absolute value, and are tested objectively on the basis of the consequences that in fact follow from an action inwardly free from them.

There is an exact correspondence with traditional teachings here, just as there was in the other behavioural elements suggested for an epoch of dissolution. To name a well-known formula that is nearly always misunderstood, thanks to overblown moralizing, there is the so-called law of karma.⁴ It concerns the effects that happen on all planes as the result of given actions, because these actions already contain their causes in potentiality: effects that are natural and neutral, devoid of moral sanction either positive or negative. It is an extension of the laws that are nowadays considered appropriate for physical phenomena, laws that contain no innate obligation

concerning the conduct that should follow once one knows about them.

As far as “evil” is concerned, there is an old Spanish proverb that expresses this idea: “God said: take what you want and pay the price”; also the Koranic saying: “He who does evil, does it only to himself.”

It is a matter of keeping in mind the possibility of certain objective reactions, and so long as one accepts them even when they are negative, one’s action remains free. The determinism of what the traditional world called “fate,” and made the basis of various forms of divination and oracles, was conceived in the same way: it was a matter of certain objective directions of events, which one might or might not take into account in view of the advantage or risk inherent in choosing a certain course.

By analogy, if someone is intending to make a risky alpine climb or a flight, once he has heard a forecast of bad weather he may either abandon or pursue it. In the latter case, he accepts the risk from the start. But the freedom remains; no “moral” factor comes into play. In some cases the “natural sanction,” the karma, can be partially neutralized. Again by analogy: one may know in advance that a certain conduct of life will probably cause harm to the organism.

But one may give it no thought and eventually resort to medicine to neutralize its effects. Then everything is reduced to an interplay of various reactions, and the ultimate effect will depend on the strongest one. The same perspective and behaviour are also valid on the nonmaterial plane.

If we assume that the being has reached a high grade of unification, everything resembling an “inner sanction” can be interpreted in the same terms—positive feelings will arise in the case of one line of action, negative in the case of an opposite line, thus conforming to “good” or “evil” according to their meanings in a certain society, a certain social stratum, a certain civilization, and a certain epoch. Apart from purely external and social reactions, a man may suffer, feel remorse, guilt, or shame when he acts contrary to the tendency that still prevails in his depths (for the ordinary man, nearly always through hereditary and social conditioning active in his subconscious), and which has only apparently been silenced by other tendencies and by the dictate of the “physical I.” On the other hand, he feels a sense of satisfaction and comfort when he obeys that tendency. In the end, the negative “inner sanction” may intervene to cause a breakdown in the case mentioned, where he starts from what he knows to be his deepest and most authentic vocation and chooses a given ideal and line of conduct, but then gives way to other pressures and passively recognizes his own weakness and failure, suffering the internal dissociation due to the uncoordinated plurality of tendencies.

These emotional reactions are purely psychological in character and origin. They may be indifferent to the intrinsic quality of the actions, and they have no transcendent significance, no character of “moral sanctions.” They are facts that are “natural” in their own way, on which one should not superimpose a mythology of moral interpretations if one has arrived at true inner freedom. These are the objective terms in which Guyau, Nietzsche, and others have treated in realistic terms such phenomena of the “moral conscience,” on which various authors have tried

to build a kind of experimental basis—moving illegitimately from the plane of psychological facts to that of pure values—for an ethics that is not overtly founded on religious commandments. This aspect disappears automatically when the being has become one and his actions spring from that unity. In order to eliminate anything implying limitation or support I would rephrase that: when the being has become one through willing it, having chosen unity; because a choice is implied even here, whose direction is not obligatory.

One might even accept and will non-unity, and in the same class of superior types that we are concerned with here, there may be those who permit themselves to do so. In such a case their basal unity does not cease to exist, but rather dematerializes and remains invisibly on a deeper plane.

Incidentally, in the same tradition to which the doctrine of karma belongs there is the possibility not only of eliminating the emotive reactions mentioned above (through “impeccability,” inner neutrality toward good and evil), but also of the “magical” neutralization of karmic reactions in the case of a being who has really burnt out his naturalistic part, and thereby become actively de-individualized.

This partial digression may serve to clarify how the “moral” plane can be eliminated impersonally, without any pathos, through considering the law of cause and effect in its fullest extension. Earlier on, I examined the field of external actions in which this law must be taken into account. In the inner realm it is a question of knowing what “blows to one’s own self” may result from certain behaviours, and of acting accordingly, with the same objectivity. The “sin” complex is a pathological formation born under the sign of the personal God, the “God of morality.” The more metaphysical traditions, on the other hand, are characterized by consciousness of an error committed, rather than by the sense of sin; and this is a theme that the superior man of our own time should make his own, beyond the dissolution of religious residues, by following the course I have described.

An additional clarification comes from these observations of Frithjof Schuon: “The Hindus and Far Easterners do not have the notion of ‘sin’ in the Semitic sense; they distinguish actions not according to their intrinsic value but according to their opportuneness in view of cosmic or spiritual reactions, and also of social utility; they do not distinguish between ‘moral’ and ‘immoral,’ but between advantageous and harmful, pleasant and unpleasant, normal and abnormal, to the point of sacrificing the former—but apart from any ethical classification—to spiritual interests. They may push renunciation, abnegation, and mortification to the limits of what is humanly possible, but without being ‘moralists’ for all that.”⁵ With that we can conclude the principal part of our investigation.

To sum up, the man for whom the new freedom does not spell ruin, whether because, given his special structure, he already has a firm base in himself, or because he is in the process of conquering it through an existential rupture of levels that reestablishes contact with the higher

dimension of “being”—this man will possess a vision of reality stripped of the human and moral element, free from the projections of subjectivity and from conceptual, finalistic, and theistic superstructures. This reduction to pure reality of the general view of the world and of existence will be described in what follows. Its counterpart is the return of the person himself to pure being: the freedom of pure existence in the outside world is confirmed in the naked assumption of his own nature, from which he draws his own rule.

This rule is a law to him to the degree that he does not start from a state of unity, and to the degree that secondary, divergent tendencies coexist and external factors try to influence him.

In the practical field of action, we have considered a regime of experiments with two degrees and two ends. First there is the proving knowledge of himself as a determined being, then of himself as a being in whom the transcendent dimension is positively present. The latter is the ultimate basis of his own law, and its supreme justification. After everything has collapsed and in a climate of dissolution, there is only one solution to the problem of an unconditioned and intangible meaning to life: the direct assumption of one’s own naked being as a function of transcendence.

As for the modes of behaviour toward the world, once a clarification and confirmation of oneself has been achieved as described, the general formula is indicated by an intrepid openness, devoid of ties but united in detachment, in the face of any possible experience.

Where this involves a high intensity of life and a regime of achievement that enliven and nourish the calm principle of transcendence within, the orientation has some features in common with Nietzsche’s “Dionysian state”; but the way in which this state should be integrated suggests that a better term would be “Dionysian Apollonism.” When one’s relations with the world are not those of lived experience in general, but of the manifestation of oneself through works and active initiatives, the style suggested is that of involvement in every act, of pure and impersonal action, “without desire,” without attachment.

Attention was also drawn to a special state of lucid inebriation that is connected with this entire orientation and is absolutely essential for the type of man under consideration, because it takes the place of that animation that, given a different world, he would receive from an environment formed by Tradition, thus filled with meaning; or else from the sub-intellectual adhesion to emotion and impulses at the vital base of existence, in pure bios.

Finally, I devoted some attention to the reality of actions and the regime of knowledge that should take the place of the mythology of inner moral sanctions and of “sin.” Those who know my other works will be aware of the correspondence between these views and certain instructions of schools and movements in the world of Tradition, which almost always concerned only the esoteric doctrine.

I repeat here what I have said already: that it is only for incidental and opportune reasons that I

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have taken into consideration themes from modern thinkers, especially Nietzsche. They serve to create a link with the problems that preoccupy Europeans who have already witnessed the arrival of nihilism and of the world without God, and have sought to go beyond these in a positive way. It must be emphasized that such references could have been dispensed with altogether.

With the intention of creating a similar link to what some contemporary thinkers have presented in a more or less muddled way, it seems useful to treat briefly that contemporary current known as existentialism, before proceeding to some particular sectors of today's culture and lifestyles, and to the proper attitude to take toward them.

Death: The Right Over Life

In our examination of existentialism, we encountered Heidegger's conception of existence as "living for death." He makes death a sort of center of gravity, because it is there that the realization of the absolute and final sense of existence, of "Dasein," has been displaced: something that even recalls the religious conception of life as preparation for death. We have seen that all the premises of Heidegger's philosophy certainly make this outcome of existence ending in death appear negative—almost ecstatically negative.

This does not prevent the idea of death from having a particular meaning for the differentiated man; on the contrary, in a certain way it can be his touchstone. Here too, it is a matter of seeing how far he has been invaded, even beneath the threshold of his ordinary consciousness, by the way of feeling that has come to be existentially determined in Western man in general, whether through complex processes of involution, or through the conceptions of the dominant, theistic religion.

Facing the idea of death, the end of the "person," his first test naturally refers to establishing in the self the incapacity for that anguish that, according to Heidegger, one should "have the courage to feel," while also discounting all those prospects of the beyond and those other worldly judgments that popular forms of religion have used to control the individual by working on the subintellectual part of his soul.

Here too, we can see that some processes of dissolution in the modern world are virtually ambivalent. Not only have atheism and materialism contributed to banishing the terrors of the soul facing death, but the tragedy of death itself has often been trivialized by the collective catastrophic events of recent times.

Today death occurs more simply and easily than in earlier times, and in turn diminishes the importance of human life, parallel to the growing insignificance and irrelevance that have marked the individual in the modern mechanized world of the masses. In addition, during the indiscriminate carpet bombings of the recent war, many could arrive at an attitude in which the death of any person, even a relative, became a natural and habitual event, having no more impact

than the destruction of something merely material and external. Meanwhile, the idea of the uncertainty of life also enters into the order of habitual events, along with the prospect that tomorrow one could cease to exist.

In most cases the result of all this is a numbing, which alone can perhaps explain the strange Heideggerian reaction of approving anguish in the face of death.

But a contrary, positive result should not be excluded when similar experiences favour an inner calm, under the sign of that which remains beyond the individual and the bond of the physical I. In antiquity, Lucretius made a functional, pragmatic use of something like modern atheistic science: in order to banish the fears of the beyond, he maintained the Olympic idea of the divine, but recognized the gods as distant essences that do not intervene in the world, and should be valued by the wise only as ideals of ontological perfection.

These aspects could provide a positive climate in the modern world for the differentiated man, because that which has been affected only concerns a vision of humanized life devoid of the sense of great distances. He can then consider a particular “contemplation of death” as a positive factor, as a challenge, and as a measure of his inner strength.

He can also follow the well-known ancient maxim of considering every day as the last of his individual existence: at the prospect, not only should he maintain his calm, but he should not even change anything in his thinking or acting. Here an example could be the kamikaze suicide pilots who had vowed to die; the prospect of being called at any moment to execute a mission with no return did not exclude them from ordinary occupations, training, and recreation, and was not at all weighed down by a dismal sense of tragedy, even when lasting for months.

More generally, the idea of death is a matter of surpassing an inner limit, of breaking a bond. To a certain extent, it brings us back to what was said in the first chapter. The positive contemplatio mortis, to which I referred, no longer gives importance to staying alive or not, and leaves death behind one, so to speak, without being paralyzed by it. On the contrary: from this point one should enter into a higher, exalted, free form of living, carried by a sort of magical, lucid intoxication.

There is one factor that positively undramatizes the idea of death: it is that mentioned when speaking of the traditional doctrine of preexistence. The differentiated man cannot think that his being begins with his physical, corporeal birth, and ends with his death. However, he can neither make the beyond the center of gravity of his life, as in the religious theory of salvation, nor can he regard terrestrial existence as the mere ascetic preparation for death. We have seen that he solves the problem of the meaning of life in the epoch of nihilism by displacing the I toward the dimension of “being.” In the preceding paragraph I spoke of the attitude consistent with this displacement, which should existentially pervade the person, just as magnetism permeates a metal. Even if in many cases the force produced from this attitude can only act sensibly beyond this existence, it should still be able to assure a calm and secure life.

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An Eastern saying puts it as follows: "Life on earth is a journey in the night hours." One can explain its positive content by referring to the sensation of a "before" (with respect to human existence) and "after" (with respect to the same). In metaphysical terms, birth is a change of state and so is death; the human condition of earthly existence is only a restricted section in a continuum, in a current that traverses many other states.

In general, but particularly in a chaotic epoch in dissolution like the present one, it can be difficult to grasp the sense of this apparition of the being that one is, in the guise of a certain person, who lives in a given time and in a given place, who goes through these experiences, of whom this will be the end: it is like the confused sensation of a region traversed in a night journey where only a few scattered lights reveal some glimpses of the landscape. Nevertheless, one should maintain the sentiment, or presentiment, of one who when getting on a train knows he will get off it, and that when he gets off he will also see the entire course travelled, and will go further. This sentiment favours an immanent firmness and security, distinctly different from the state that arises in the soul facing death within the framework of a creationist theistic religion, in which whatever part of the being is superior and anterior to life, thus also metaphysically surviving the death that ends it, remains effectively hidden.

However, any change of state involves a crisis; only the traditional view mentioned earlier can completely eliminate the problematic nature of the beyond and the event of death itself. Here, again, we would have to examine teachings that fall outside the scope of this book. I will limit myself to showing that the valid attitude toward the beyond is the same attitude that I proposed for life in general: that of a transcendental confidence, joined on one side by the "heroic" and "sacrificial" disposition (readiness to actively take oneself beyond oneself), on the other by one's capacity to dominate his soul, impulses, and imagination: just as one who, in a difficult and risky situation does not lose control of him self, doing lucidly and without hesitation all that can be done.

Through this, one should benefit from all the recommendations in the preceding pages, recommendations that can then be as valid beyond life as they are for life in the current epoch. Last but not least, they include the disposition of being ready "to bear lethal blows on one's own being without being destroyed."

At this point, we shall briefly turn our attention to a particular problem, the right over one's own life, understood as the freedom to accept it or to put an end to it voluntarily. The examination of this issue will also allow a further clarification of some points considered earlier.

Suicide, condemned by most moralities with social and religious foundations, has in fact been permitted by two doctrines whose norms of life are not far from those indicated for the differentiated man in the present epoch: Stoicism and Buddhism. One can refer to the ideas of Seneca regarding Stoicism, recalling above all the general background of its vision of life. I have already said that for Seneca the true man would be above the gods themselves because they, by their very nature, do not know adversity and misfortune, whereas he is exposed to them, but has

the power to triumph over them. Moreover, Seneca sees the beings that are most harshly tested as the worthiest, recalling this analogy: in war it is the most capable, sure, and qualified persons that leaders entrust with the most exposed positions and the hardest tasks.

Usually it is this virile and agonistic conception that applies when suicide is condemned and stigmatized as cowardice and desertion. (There is a saying attributed by Cicero to the Pythagoreans: “To leave the place that one is assigned in life is not permitted without an order from the leader, who is God.”) Instead Seneca reached the opposite conclusion, and put the justification of suicide directly into the mouth of divinity (De Providentia, 6.7-9). He makes the divinity say that he has given the superior man, the sage, not only a force stronger than any contingency, and something more than being exempt from evils, namely the power to triumph over them interiorly, but has also ensured that no one can hold him back against his will: the path to “exit” is open to him—*patet exi tus*. “Wherever you do not want to fight, it is always possible to retreat. You have been given nothing easier than death.” Given the presuppositions mentioned earlier with regard to the general vision of life, there is no doubt that Seneca did not intend this decision to refer to cases in which death is sought because a given situation appears unbearable: especially then, one could not permit oneself the act. Here too it is unnecessary to add what is equally valid for all those who are driven to cut their life short due to emotional and impassioned motives, because this would be equivalent to recognizing one’s own passivity and impotence toward the irrational part of one’s soul. The same is even true for cases in which social motives intervene. Both the ideal Stoic type and the differentiated man do not permit these motives to intimately touch them, as if their dignity were injured by what binds them to social life. They would never be driven to put an end to their own existence for these motives, which are included by the Stoics in the category of “that which does not depend on me.” The only exception we can consider is the case of a disgrace not before others whose judgment and contempt one cannot bear, but before oneself, because of one’s own downfall.

Considering all this, Seneca’s maxim can only have the meaning of an enhancement of the inner freedom of a superior being. It is not a matter of retreating because one does not feel strong enough before such ordeals and circumstances; rather, it is a matter of the sovereign right—that one always keeps in reserve—to either accept these ordeals or not, and even to draw the line when one no longer sees a meaning in them, and after having sufficiently demonstrated to oneself the capacity to face them. Impassibility is taken for granted, and the right to “exit” is justifiable as one of the possibilities to be considered, in principle, only for the sake of decreeing that our circumstances have our assent, that we are really active in them, and that we are not just making a virtue of necessity. This Stoic point of view is intelligible and, what is more, unassailable.

We turn now to Buddhism, whose orientation is more or less the same. Also there the most frequent kind of suicide is forbidden: when ever one is driven to renounce life in the name of life itself, that is, because some form of a will to live, enjoy, and be worthwhile has been hindered or thwarted, killing oneself is censured. In fact, in these cases the act is not judged as a freeing of

oneself but, on the contrary, as the extreme, even negative, form of attachment to life, of dependence on life.

No transfiguring beyond can be expected by one who uses such violence on himself; in other states of being, the law of an existence devoid of peace, stability, and light is once again asserted over him.

Buddhism even goes as far as condemning as a deviation the impulse toward extinction, nirvana, if one discovers that it is connected to any desire, any “thirst.”

At the same time, like Stoicism, it permits suicide with a similar restriction: it does not apply to the commonality, but to a superior and ascetic type in whom are found, intensified, many traits of the Stoic sage; those who in a certain way have realized a separation of the Self, to the extent of being virtually beyond both living and nonliving.

Though obviously this prospect can also be included in the horizon of the differentiated man, it leaves the path open for some difficulties.

First of all, if he has reached the spiritual level just indicated, what could ever make him initiate a voluntary death? Judging from certain concrete cases alleged by Buddhist texts, some of the cases mentioned earlier would seem to be in question: in some circumstances there is no reason to feel committed beyond a certain limit. One can then “exit,” almost as when one has had enough of a game, or as when one shoos a fly away after having let it settle for a time on one’s face. It remains to be seen how far one can be truly sure of oneself, and sincere with oneself, in cases of this kind.

Up to this point, it is the “person” that we have essentially considered. The issue becomes more complex when going beyond the level of the person and referring to the traditional doctrine in which the being does not begin with earthly existence. Then a higher concept of responsibility, and also of risk, shows itself. It is not the responsibility called upon in the framework of a theistic and creationist religion, which condemns suicide by appealing to a kind of military loyalty as in Cicero’s terms: one should not abandon his post. Such an idea appears absurd when the preexistence of the soul is denied (as that religion denies it) before its union with the body in the human condition. In this “creationist” hypothesis one cannot sensibly speak of responsibility, because before being in the assigned “post” one did not exist at all, and because one suddenly finds oneself in it without having wanted or accepted it.

Nor can one speak of a “military obligation” toward a life received, but not requested. I have already examined the dead end to which such a conception, connected to the theistic creationist point of view, leads when it is assailed by nihilism. The extreme here is in Dostoyevsky, with Kirilov’s existential revolt and “metaphysical suicide” in which he takes his own life only to prove to himself that he is stronger than fear, his sovereignty, and an absolute freedom that makes him God. This position is absurd because here, no less than in theism, the only point of reference always appears to be the person; it is from the person that the initiative arises, it is the

person that wants to make itself absolute. For a similar case, Augustine's words could even be valid: "Slave, you wanted to simulate a mutilated freedom by doing the illicit with impunity, in a blind imitation of omnipotence."¹ As we have seen, this is also the reason why Raskolnikov and Stavrogin fell, the latter's suicide corresponding to that type that is imposed by one's own failure—though, from an entirely different standpoint, it could be justified in a given human type under special circumstances, as touched on earlier.

But the problem of responsibility is seen under a different light when one refers to the traditional doctrine that we saw to have been more or less confusedly shadowed by existentialism itself: if one holds on to the idea that whatever one is as a person in the human condition proceeds from an original, prenatal, and pretemporal choice, wherein one willed, in terms of an "original project" (as Sartre calls it), every thing that would define the contents of one's existence. In this case, it is no longer a matter of answering to a Creator, but to something referring to the very dimension of being or transcendence in oneself. The course of existence, though not attributable to the more exterior and already human will of the individual (the person), follows, in principle, a line that has significance for the I, even though still latent or concealed: as an entirety of experiences important not in themselves but for the reactions that they provoke in us, reactions through which that being that one wished to be can be realized. In that case, life in this world cannot be considered as something that one can arbitrarily throw away, nor can it be considered simply as a bad situation in which the only choice is faith or fatalistic resignation (we have seen that, at best, the horizons of modern existentialism end there), or else being locked into a continuous trial of resistance (as happens along the lines of a dark Stoicism, devoid of the background of transcendence). As in an adventure, a mission, a trial, an election, or an experiment, earthly life appears to be something to which one committed oneself before finding oneself in the human condition, accepting in anticipation whatever difficult, miserable, or dramatic aspects it might bring, aspects that are especially likely in an epoch like the present.

In these terms we can define and accept a principle of responsibility and "loyalty," without external, "heteronomous" references.

I have already spoken of the only presuppositions that, according to Stoicism and Buddhism, would permit the act of suicide: a superiority, a detachment from life.

It is, however, difficult to realize them without meanwhile achieving, in some way, a supra-personal meaning of existence on earth in the terms just mentioned: there being added the sensation that the whole of this existence is only an episode, a passage, as in the image of the voyage at night. Then would not feeling in oneself any impatience, any intolerance, or even any tediousness testify to the presence of a too human residue, of something not yet resolved by the sense of eternity or, at least, by great unearthly and non-temporal distances? And if it were so, would one not be obliged, facing oneself, not to act? An Islamic saying, appropriate for a rigorous doctrine of predestination, is true: "No one can die unless by the will of Allah and at the moment fixed by Him." Similarly, if one assumes the predetermined course of the essential course of individual existence, even suicide could be thought of as one of the particular acts already

contemplated, so that it only appears to be an arbitrary initiative of the person. However, this is an extreme assumption, and in reality the decision could only be illuminated by the degree of effective integration that has been attained, in terms already mentioned, as the welding of the person with Being. It is certain that in an integration of this kind, even if incomplete, suicide could have the meaning of an extreme gesture that seals one's sovereignty, in terms quite different from those of Kirilov: the sovereignty would not be of the person, but over the person. All that would remain would be the responsibility inherent in affirming that what acts is precisely the principle that is not the person, but possesses the person.

However, recourse to this action can rarely present a positive and intelligible character for the differentiated man. Everyone knows that sooner or later the end will come, so that when facing every contingency it is more valuable to try to decipher the hidden meaning, the part that it has in a context that, according to the view mentioned earlier, is not alien to us, but proceeds from our transcendental will.

Matters are obviously different when one does not directly seek death but includes it, so to speak, in life, considering situations in which death coincides with obtaining the utmost meaning from life in the human condition. Here, unlike what Heidegger described, it is not a matter of a presumed gravitation of the “Dasein” of any finite existence—having its own principle outside itself—toward death and as if from one's dependence on it. The presupposition is instead a special and uncommon orientation that can be given to one's own life.

In place of violent and direct action over one's life, one can “interrogate” it through forms of intense and risky existence. There are ways to put an ever more peremptory and insistent question to “destiny” (we intend this term as when speaking of *amor fati* and the special confidence in always following one's own way, in any event or contingency) in order to obtain the response as to how far there is still a profound, impersonal reason for existing in the human condition. And if this questioning leads to situations in which the borderline between life and death also represents the extreme limit of the sense and fullness of a life—differently from what would come from exaltation, simple intoxication, or a confused, ecstatic effort—then one would certainly reach the most satisfying condition for existentially overcoming the problem faced by us.

The formula referred to in context of a change of polarity of living, of particular intensities of living as a means toward a more-than-living, evidently finds its supreme application on this path. In particular, here one can see a connection with the special orientations considered in this chapter: measuring oneself in a contemplation of death, living every day in the present as if it were the last, and the quasi-magnetic orientation to be induced in one's own being, which may not manifest in this existence with the complete rupture of the ontological level proper to “initiation,” but will not fail to emerge at the right moment, in order to carry one beyond.

One will see, therefore, that dwelling on this problem of death and the right over life, as the last problem of all we have examined, is of the greatest advantage regarding the attitude and

behaviour of the differentiated and unbroken man in an epoch of dissolution.

Elevating oneself above that which can be understood in the light of human reason alone; reaching a high interior level and an invulnerability otherwise hard to attain: these are perhaps among the possibilities that, through adequate reactions, are offered in the cases in which the night journey allows almost nothing to be perceived of the landscape that one traverses, and in which the theory of *Geworfenheit*, of being absurdly “flung” into the world and time, seems to be true, especially in a climate in which physical existence itself must present a growing insecurity.

If one can allow one’s mind to dwell on a bold hypothesis—which could also be an act of faith in a higher sense—once the idea of *Geworfenheit* is rejected, once it is conceived that living here and now in this world has a sense, because it is always the effect of a choice and a will, one might even believe that one’s own realization of the possibilities I have indicated—far more concealed and less imaginable in other situations that might be more desirable from the merely human point of view, from the point of view of the “person”—is the ultimate rationale and significance of a choice made by a “being” that wanted to measure itself against a difficult challenge: that of living in a world contrary to that consistent with its nature, that is, contrary to the world of Tradition.

from "**The Bow and the Club**"

The Olympian Ideal and Natural Law

From the examples provided in the previous chapters, it is evident that in order to get a clear idea of many phenomena of the contemporary age, it is often necessary to take as one’s point of reference ideals and principles belonging to a previous world — that which I usually refer to as the world of Tradition. This also holds true in the political and social domain. Today people hardly realise what a low level we have reached through the influence of those forces and myths which have gained the upper hand the modern West. People fail to grasp the inner dimension and deeper meaning of many structures and conceptions, precisely because they lack adequate points of reference and the kind of distance which is the precondition for any clear vision.

The decadence of the idea of State, the rise of democracy, the ‘socialist’ ideal, and even nationalism as a mass phenomenon fall within this complex.

There is no perception of what all this means. I have already focused on this topic elsewhere, recalling that the general view from which we need to set out in order to find our bearings is the dualism between ‘form’ and ‘matter’.

‘Form’ classically had the meaning of spirit, and matter that of nature. The former is connected to the paternal, virile, luminous and Olympian element (according to the sense of ‘Olympian’

that the reader ought to be familiar with by now); the latter is connected to the feminine, material and purely vital element. The State corresponds to ‘form’; the people, the demos, and the masses correspond to ‘matter’. In an ordinary situation, the principle of form, conceived as something self-existent and transcendent, orders, checks, limits and guides whatever is connected to the principle of matter towards a higher level. ‘Democracy’, in the broader sense, entails not only the breakdown of that synthesis between the two principles which is the hallmark of all higher forms of organisation, but also the establishment of the material principle — the people, the masses, society — as an autonomous and dominant principle which becomes the centre of gravity.

Only a shadow of the State remains: a State which has been emptied and reduced to the merely ‘representative’ and administrative structure of the democratic regime; or the so-called ‘State based on the rule of law’, in which a series of abstract decrees, whose original meaning is lost, constitute the ultimate point of reference in normative terms; or, finally, the ‘socialist labour State’, ‘workers’ state’, and so on. This mutilation is the origin of the underlying materialism and the purely ‘physical’ character of modern forms of social organisation. We are lacking the very foundations to ensure that every activity has a higher meaning, that ‘life’ may participate in what is more than life, following the paths and disciplines known to other ages. If the individual today is required to serve others and not to pursue his own selfish interests, this is only in the name of ‘society’ and ‘the community’ which is to say of abstractions, or in any case of something which does not at all entail any elevation to a higher qualitative level. Materialism does not at all cease to exist in the passage from the individual to society or the community; rather, it may even be strengthened by this shift. I have further developed these ideas in the aforementioned book.

Here I will focus on a specific point, namely what is known as ‘natural law’, which has played a significant role in subversive modern ideologies.

The ultimate background of this idea is a utopian and optimistic conception of human nature. According to the theory of natural law, there exist, with regard to what is just and unjust, to what is lawful and unlawful, certain immutable principles which are innate to human nature, yet universal; and so-called ‘right reason’ can always grasp these directly. The sum of such principles makes up natural law, which by and large has the same characteristics as morality, and therefore possesses an authority, dignity and intrinsic force that ‘positive law’ — i.e. the law established by the State — does not. Thus, on the basis of ‘natural law’, it has been possible to challenge the State or at any rate cripple its authority: because its laws — according to this view — are justified by mere necessity and lack any superior investiture, their legitimacy ought to be assessed against ‘natural law’. The Catholic Church itself has adopted this reasoning, and has done so, quite justifiably, for polemical purposes, to oppose the principle of pure political sovereignty in the name of the so-called ‘natural rights of man’, which in their modern version more or less coincide with the Jacobins’ “immortal principles” of ‘89.

The Church has often acted as the guardian and advocate of natural law, precisely in order to claim a higher position for itself vis-à-vis the State.

That we are dealing here with mere abstractions is made clear by the fact that, despite centuries of controversies, no one has ever been able to exactly and unambiguously define ‘human nature’ (in the singular), the naturalis ratio, nor any objective criterion to assess whether something truly agrees with that ‘nature’. Essentially, mere reference has been made to a few basic principles that are tacitly regarded as being necessary in order to ensure life (thus Grotius speaks of ‘consonance with the reasonable and sociable nature of man’).

Yet herein lies the fallacy: ultimately, different kinds of social units are conceivable, and have existed, and the ‘natural’ assumptions of one group do not coincide — or only partly coincide — with those of other groups. Besides, when attempting to abandon the general formula and define natural law, which ought to be one and universal, this or that principle has been added or removed, depending on the author and the period. For instance, 17th- and 18th-century natural law theorists chose to ignore certain ideas that ancient authors had included in ‘natural law’: to take but one example, in the Classical world natural law often did not rule out the institution of slavery.

However, it cannot be disputed that whenever we speak of natural law, we find a certain common denominator, a nucleus of distinguishing features which, moreover, does not at all correspond to human nature in general but only to a certain human nature, in relation to which ‘society’ itself acquires a very particular form and meaning. Natural law is not at all a single law, valid and evident everywhere and for everyone: it is only one kind of law, the particular conception of law developed by a certain type of civilisation and a certain type of man. As for the idea that, unlike political law, this kind of law corresponds to the divine will — whether this is seen as being normative in itself or rooted in the conscience of man as a rational being, as for instance Kant’s so-called ‘categorical imperative’ — this is nothing but a myth, a speculative smokescreen set up by those who defend and seek to affirm a view that reflects a particular outlook and ideal of society.

The ethical, if not purely sacred, character attributed to natural law is instead denied to positive law, which is said to spring from ‘necessity’ or even violence — indeed, the institutions of positive political law have often come to be regarded as being *magis violentiae quam leges*.

It is quite evident that this view reflects a civilisation which has already entered the secular and rationalistic stage. It is an established fact that primordially there was no purely political law, no purely ‘positive’ law; primordially, all law was a *ius sacrum* that derived much of its normative authority from a supra-human sphere. This is true of a wide range of different political constitutions, in cities as much as in States and empires — as is readily acknowledged by contemporary historians of antiquity. The situation must have already become confused in people’s minds via a process of involution the moment an opposition emerged between natural law and positive law, so that an ethical and spiritual value was assigned to the former yet denied to the latter. It is also worth mentioning, in passing, that we are faced here with a paradoxical reversal of values: given the distinction between men living more *barbarorum*, naturalistically, outside the influence of any higher civilisation, and those living within a positive, well-structured

and hierarchical order centred on the idea of the State, it is concluded that the former have an advantage over the latter, insofar as it is they who live according to the naturalis ratio and follow the so-called ‘law of God written in the hearts of men’, whereas the latter only obey revocable and man imposed norms sprung from necessity. The logical consequences of all this were drawn by the champions of the ‘noble savage’, Rousseau and those of his ilk.

Having established that the opposition between natural law and positive law does not apply to the particular laws of ancient States, and that so-called natural law possesses no particular dignity but is only a special kind of law intended for a given kind of society, we must now turn to consider that which, in a way, constitutes the recurrent feature of all theories of natural law: namely egalitarianism. According to natural law, all men are equal; indeed, according to one perspective, equality is not limited to human beings alone, but also extends to all living beings. Natural law proclaims the indiscriminate, intangible and innate freedom of every individual. Thus in antiquity Ulpian himself decried the juridical absurdity of manumissio, which is to say the freeing of slaves, since according to his view of natural law there is no such thing as slavehood.

In its more moderate forms, natural law is connected to a communal conception of property communis omnium possessio— which logically derives from the idea that equals have equal rights. One detail here, as we shall soon see, proves revealing: according to the ancient idea of natural law, anyone born out of wedlock was to be considered the son, not of his father, but of his mother alone, just as in those cases where it was difficult to establish the paternity of a child.

J. J. Bachofen, a brilliant scholar of antiquity who has been almost completely forgotten by contemporary culture, was the first to identify the key idea from which this whole outlook has sprung: the ‘physical maternal’ conception of existence. The reference here is to a kind of civilisation incapable of conceiving anything higher than the physical principle of generation and natural fecundity, personified — on the religious and mythological level — by maternal deities and especially Mother Earth, Magna Mater (the Great Mother). Before the generating Mother, all beings are equal.

Her law knows no exclusivism or differences; her love shuns all limits; and her sovereignty does not allow any individual to claim a special right over that which ‘by nature’ belongs to all beings collectively. The quality of being a ‘child of the Mother’ ensures intangible, sacred, equal rights to all. Equality goes hand in hand with physical intangibility and a specifically brotherly-social ideal of organised life is defined as being ‘in compliance with nature’. All this is not necessarily associated with an explicit matriarchy. The origins may be forgotten, the chthonic background (i.e. the background related to the ‘earth’) may become utterly invisible, yet live on in a particular spirit and pathos, in an inner character: this is the case, for instance, when the principles of natural law are applied in themselves, in the abstract, on a rationalistic level.

It is clear what aspects of the more ancient law of Rome are irreducible to this outlook: *patria potestas*, virile, aristocratic, senatorial and consular authority, the very conception of the State

and, ultimately, the theology of imperium.

Thus Rome is marked by an antithesis: alongside laws and institutions of this sort we find individual elements that, as the counterpart to particular cults, attest to layers reflecting that ancient Mediterranean civilisation which can generally be described as Pelasgian.

At its centre stands, in various forms, the cult of the Great Mothers of nature, life, and fecundity. If we return to the legal background positively embodied by the Roman State, we find that up until a certain period the upper strata of Roman society were also shaped by a religious conception, only one opposite to the chthonic religious just outlined: for the State and its law expressed the same kind of sovereignty that the ancient Indo-European man assigned to the paternal forces of Light and of the luminous sky in contrast to the maternal deities of the Earth and even of the Heavens. Christoph Steding has rightly spoken of the ‘luminous deities of the political world’.

I have already mentioned how the heavenly and Olympian deities were also seen to govern the world as *cosmos* and *ordo*. The higher Hellenic conception of *cosmos*, i.e. of an orderly and articulated whole, equivalent to the Indo-European conception of *rta*, also informs the Roman ideal of the State and of law.

An etymological correspondence here (*rta*, *ritus*) reveals the most profound meaning of the strict, specific ritualism that constituted the counterpart of Roman patrician law.

This law was differentiated and, by contrast to natural law, encompassed the principle of hierarchy. Instead of the equality of individuals vis-à-vis the Great Mother, what applied here was the principle of different degrees of dignity based on one’s origin, one’s particular position within a given stock or people, one’s relations with the *res publica*, and one’s specific vocations.

The plebs instead obeyed a kind of law and idea of community where neither the individual himself nor his origins or clan carried much weight — a community that originally stood for the most part under the aegis of avenging female and chthonic deities.

It was chiefly deities of this sort that the plebs of the ancient Roman State had worshipped even in rather remote times. According to an ancient description in the legal field, the plebeians were precisely the ‘Children of the Earth’. The relation between certain peculiar features of these cults and the ‘natural law’ atmosphere associated with them is also significant. In Rome too the celebrations devoted to such goddesses often entailed a kind of return to the state of justice, as conceived by primordial natural law, with the temporary abrogation of the criteria of positive law: participants celebrated the return to the kind of universal equality that knows no privileges or distinctions in terms of clan, blood, gender or caste. Moreover, the temple of one of these Mothers, the goddess Feronia, housed the stone throne upon which slaves would sit during the manumission ceremony, when the goddess would acknowledge their natural equality vis-à-vis freemen.

Fides and Fidonia were another two similar goddesses who, as noted by Bachofen, maternally

protected the plebs from the invida iura and malignae leges (coinciding with the forms of positive political and patrician law).

Hence we find a temple built in their honour by freedmen. Other female deities or legendary figures are associated with the early demands made by the plebs and with the cults of the Aventine, the hill so dear to the plebs.

And when Ulpian justifies the practice of assigning children born without the sanction of positive law to their mothers, he is echoing the archaic matriarchal view (a view which had remained particularly strong among the Etruscans), according to which children belonged first and foremost to their mother rather than father, and would take her name. It would be possible to provide many other details of this sort, all leading us to the same point.

The ‘natural law’ elements that increasingly came into force in decadent, late Roman times are to be regarded as a counterpart to the predominance acquired in Rome by lower, bastard social strata and by their spirit. The crucial point, therefore, is that we are dealing not with the view of a given school of law, but rather with that of a given ethos and civilisation, which regained strength in the period of universalistic crumbling of the Empire.

The figure of Ulpian, a man of Phoenician blood, is highly significant.

Alleged ‘natural law’ may be regarded as one episode in the counter-offensive which the Asian-Pelasgian Mediterranean world launched against Rome — a counteroffensive waged also through the increasing spread of exotic cults and mores in late Roman times. In several respects, Christianity continued this course: given its theological sanctioning of the principle of the equality of all men, the place assigned to natural law by Catholicism is little wonder.

I shall not take these references to primordial times any further. The point is that, generally speaking, the principles of natural law are not indispensable for the existence of a society; rather, these principles tend to establish and give sanction to a given type of society. In modern terms, they correspond to a ‘social ethic’ opposed to a ‘political ethic’. Certain principles and values that not only differ from those of natural law but partly contradict them, while preserving a degree of uniformity and universality, have always been ‘in accordance with nature’ and constituted an inner imperative for a particular type of man. Instead of equality, freedom and brotherhood, what comes to the forefront here is the principle of difference, inequality and justice (in the sense of ‘suum cuique’), along with the principle of hierarchy — the ideal of a kind of unity which is not fraternal, communitarian and naturalistic but heroic and virile, and an ethic not of ‘love’ but of honour. My work *Revolt Against the Modern World* illustrates precisely the endurance of typical orientations and forms based on these points of reference, which a certain kind of humanity held to be evident and acknowledged on essentially spiritual grounds, establishing them as the foundation of a different kind of civilisation and society.

It cannot be denied, however, that in later ages ‘positive law’ acquired features that have often coincided precisely with that which natural law theorists would argue it has always been. It has come to embody the codification of forms imposed by a formless power, devoid of any real charisma; even more often, it has been reduced to the kind of common law that regulates bourgeois society through the ‘routine’ of the administrative State. As for the so-called ‘State based on the rule of law’, this rests, as already noted, on a sort of fetishism of an emptied and soulless positive law, which is assigned an immutable character and absolute validity — as though it had descended from heaven, and were not the crystallisation of a particular socio-political situation, the creation of a given historical human group. All these are but sub-products and deviations. This necessary acknowledgement, however, in no way undermines my argument regarding those demands which are inspired by ‘natural law’ within the context of democracy, the ideology of social life, and even a certain form of Christianity, by contrast to the political and ethical idea of the State. The necessarily succinct overview just provided exposes the deep meaning of these subversive developments, not merely in abstract and philosophical terms, but in terms of the revealing signs of regression, of the emergence and predominance of a specific inner race in man, the decline of a higher human type along with its symbols and law. The crisis of the traditional world brought about the resurfacing of the ‘matriarchal’ and naturalistic substrate, to the detriment of the prestige hitherto enjoyed by the symbol of paternity, which endured in the major dynastic civilisations of Europe — those that ruled by ‘divine right’. ‘Matter’ has now broken free from ‘form’ and become sovereign. This reversal takes a variety of forms: democracy, the masses, ‘the people’, ‘the nation’ and the community based on blood and ethnicity in opposition to everything that the State embodies. The principles governing the ideal of politics and human bonds are no longer the paternal, spiritual ideals, but others that essentially may be traced back to a naturalistic substance, to the world of quantity, and even to the irrationality of collective sentiments fuelled by ‘myths’. It is indisputably true that, to quote the aforementioned Steding, spiritually feminine or ‘matriarchal’ natures speak out in support of the ‘people’ and ‘society’, conceiving democracy as the pinnacle of world history.

We will see how other currents of our age converge in the same direction when, in a subsequent chapter, we examine the level of certain contemporary claims pertaining to the sexual domain (the so-called ‘sexual revolution’).

The Laughter of the Gods

It is obvious that modern civilisation in all its aspects has an essentially anti-aristocratic character on the political and social level. However, this is also true on the spiritual level, on the level of culture and people’s outlook, even though the anti-aristocratic trait is harder to detect here because the necessary points of reference have been lost almost entirely.

Here I wish to highlight a particular aspect of the situation related to the rise of ‘humanism’. I will use this term in a broad sense, distinguishing it from historical humanism in the period of the

so-called Renaissance, even though this kind of humanism constituted a crucial turning point in the upheaval to which I am referring. What I mean by ‘humanism’, strictly speaking, is a general perspective centred merely on man, on the human condition, that makes everything human into a cult object — a genuine fetish. Here I will not consider the more degraded forms of this cult, such as ‘Marxist humanism’ and ‘labour humanism’. Instead, I will focus on those forms which are related to the so-called ‘tragic view of life’, insofar as they tend to assign much ‘human’ worth to rebellious or subversive historical or mythical figures, and to side with them — this being the ideal and romantic counterpart to the plebeian and subversive revolutionary ideologies of recent times.

According to a certain mentality, being human — and nothing but human — is a glory in itself. The wretched, dark, painful and broken aspects of the human condition are termed ‘tragic,’ and are praised consistently with the premises adopted. The prototype of the ‘noble’ human spirit is found in whomever rebels against higher forces, in the Titans, or in Prometheus.

Therefore, one speaks of ‘deeply humane works’, of ‘humane awareness’, of a ‘vivid and deep sense of humaneness’. One admires the ‘tragic greatness’ of a given life, or a face brightened by ‘inner tragedy’.

Finally, one praises the ‘Promethean spirit’, the ‘noble spirit of rebellion’, the ‘Titanism of the will’, and so on. The same tendency is also reflected by Carducci’s Hymn to Satan and by certain forms of Faustianism.

This sort of lingo was common among intellectuals, men of letters and the champions of a historicist and progressive philosophy which they had largely inherited from the Enlightenment. Its ridiculous and rhetorical nature went quite undetected, until an even further step down was taken with the aforementioned ‘integral humanism’ of collectivist and materialist Marxists, which dismisses even these superstructures in order to proclaim the mystique of the beast of burden and production. What we have here are clear indicators of the spiritually anti-aristocratic character of a typically modern view of life.

To get a vivid idea of the drop in level behind all this one might turn to the Classical world, to aspects, myths and symbols that are specific to it — provided these are not examined in the distorted or irrelevant form that is common to the latest expositions. It may be useful here to refer to what Karl Kerényi has written with regard to the meaning of Prometheus and the titanic spirit in his work *La religione antica nelle sue linee fondamentali*.

As a preliminary step, Kerényi emphasises two points. The first is that the ancient Classical world, in its loftiest and most original aspects, was ignorant of ‘faith’ in the current sense of the term, since its religiosity was essentially based on a sense of reality and of the actual presence of divine powers. ‘Faith presupposes doubt and ignorance, which are overcome by believing.’ ‘Faith’ did not play any relevant role in the world-view of ancient men, because the perception of divine forces was as natural and direct a part of their experience and life as the data from the sensible world. For this reason — I should note in passing — a deplorable confusion is produced

whenever the term ‘religion’, understood in its current, Christian sense, with faith as the centre, is indiscriminately applied to ancient spirituality and to primordial spirituality more generally. In this connection, one may refer to what I have already argued with regard to traditional ‘myths’ and to what I will argue later when defining the concept of initiation.

The second point concerns the idea of the primordial unity between gods and men. ‘Gods and men have the same origin’, Hesiod tells us, echoed by Pindar. Two races, the same ‘blood’. Vis-à-vis divine powers, the Orphic initiate states: ‘Mine is a heavenly race, and you know this too.’ Many other similar testimonies could be adduced. En echo of this is even to be found in the Gospel, albeit in strident contrast with the climate that distinguishes it, in the saying ‘You are gods.’

That the gods are looking at men, that they are even present at their feasts and ritual banquets (the Romans had the distinctive ceremony of the lectisternium), that they appear and take a seat alongside men, and so on — these images from the ancient world are not mere fantasies. They attest, in a figurative way, to man’s sense of being with the gods. They are testimonies of a particular existential condition.

Nor are we to think of any ‘mysticism’ here. Kerényi states: ‘Starting from Homer and Hesiod, this absolute form of a non-mythical being together might be defined as follows: to sit together, to perceive and know oneself by reciprocally gazing into the primordial state of existence.’

Kerényi speaks of a primordial state of existence on account of the antiquity of the testimonies that express this way of perceiving things.

Over time, the feeling in question waned and had to be reawakened through specific cultural actions, ultimately only manifesting itself sporadically. Already Homer mentions the fact that the feeling of actually being with the gods, as in the primordial state, is only experienced by special peoples ‘whose existence fluctuates between divinity and humanity indeed, they are closer to the gods than to men.’

We must not necessarily think here of races belonging to a mythical antiquity. Even in ancient Rome specific and significant testimonies are to be found. One might mention the figure of the *flamen dialis*, who was regarded as a ‘living statue’ of the Olympian deity, and of Livy’s description of some figures from the period of the Gaulish invasion, who were ‘more similar to gods than men’: *praeter ornatum habitumque humano augustiorem, maiestate etiam ... simillimos dis.*

Caesar himself — to whom many assign the profane attributes of a ‘dictator’ or Napoleon-like conqueror — is a man who in his youth could, according to Suetonius, claim that his lineage exhibited ‘the majesty of kings and sacredness of the gods, in whose power also those who rule men lie’.

Even in the demonic practices of the late Roman Empire ideas and customs survived that, almost like murky glimmers, point to the natural perception of divine forces.

‘Peoples whose existence fluctuated between the divine and the human’ this is the fundamental point. After this stage, different vocations emerged. Those who fluctuated between the divine and the human ultimately chose the latter, and made a boast of it. They were not aware of the degradation this implied, nor of the laughter of the gods. Here one may refer to Kerényi’s reflections on the consideration that was originally given to the titanic spirit Classical world.

Hesiod defines this spirit very clearly through the epithets he gives Prometheus: these are all designations of the active, inventive and cunning mind that seeks to deceive Zeus’ *voūç*, which is to say the Olympian mind.

But this mind can neither be deceived nor shaken. It is as firm and untroubled as a mirror; it discloses everything without searching for anything — everything is disclosed within it. By contrast, the titanic spirit is restless, inventive and always in search of something, by cunning and intuition. The object of the Olympian mind is what is real, being, that which is as it truly is. The object of the titanic spirit, instead, is invention, but this is only a well-construed lie.

It is worth quoting Kerényi’s expressions. The Olympian mind corresponds to *ἀλήθεια*, which is to say non-concealment (the term means truth in Greek), whereas the titanic spirit loves what is crooked, because a lie is intrinsically crooked (*ἀγκύλος*), as is too an intelligent invention like the lasso or noose (*ἀγκόλη*). The natural counterpart to the Olympian mind, or *voūç*, is the transparency of being; when the *voūç* fades, all that remains is being in its dark reality. The natural counterpart to the titanic spirit is instead spiritual misery: foolishness, imprudence, and clumsiness. What remains in the world after all of Prometheus’ inventions is more misery for mankind; when the sacrifice is accomplished (the sacrifice through which Prometheus has sought to deceive the Olympian mind), Zeus takes fire back from mortals. And when, after stealing the fire, Prometheus himself is removed from mankind and made to suffer his penalty, Epimetheus alone remains as the representative of the race of mortals: in place of the cunning one the fool remains, as his counterpart. The deep affinity between these two figures of Greek myth is expressed by the fact that they are brothers.

One might almost say that ‘a single and primordial being, both cunning and foolish, here appears to split into two different brothers’. Prometheus is the cunning and far-sighted one, Epimetheus he who reflects too late.

The latter, in his imprudence, will accept as a gift from the gods woman, the last inexhaustible source of misery for mankind. According to Hesiod’s account of this last and crucial episode in the struggle between the two spirits, Zeus laughs, knowing that men will enjoy the gift and love their misfortune.

Thus Kerényi. This laughter marks the ultimate defeat of the titan and usurper. Kerényi clearly highlights this fundamental idea governing the ancient world. Olympian laughter is lethal. Yet no one, strictly speaking, dies from it; nothing is changed in the human being, a being who is filled with contradictions, a being exemplified by both Prometheus and Epimetheus. So what is destroyed by this laughter? The very importance of titanic misery, its allegedly tragical quality.

In the face of Zeus, a laughing spectator, the eternal race of men plays out its eternal human comedy.

Even when a heroic element comes into play, the situation does not change at all, as far as the relation between these values is concerned.

Kerényi makes this quite clear. According to the ancient conception of the world, the primordial titanic substratum of being and the laughter of the gods are interconnected. Insofar as human existence remains a prisoner to that primordial substratum, it is miserable and, from an Olympian point of view, ridiculous and devoid of importance. This meaning is only confirmed when human gestures acquire an epic character. According to this ancient perspective, the gravity of discord and tension, struggle and slaughter, among the unhappy race of men — once the brothers of the gods — may even have cosmic consequences. Precisely in order to emphasise the magnitude of this tragedy, Homer even allows nature to take part by breaking its own laws through prodigies. Everything seems to contribute to augmenting the tragic importance of the hero.

Yet, according to the point of view of the ancient spirituality I am here referring to, which is to say according to what we might call the point of view of the ‘primordial state of existence’ — the state that existed before the consolidation of the human and Promethean illusion — does not move or deceive the *voūç*, the Olympian mind, any more than titanic cunning does.

Kerényi notes that, according to the ancient conception in question, the only illusion which was acceptable in the relations between man and God was the tragic importance of a heroic existence as a spectacle for the gods (as Seneca too repeatedly states).

But the most tragic side of this importance lies in the fact that, as long as the spiritual eye of the tragic hero is not fully open, it too must break down and vanish before divine laughter. For this laughter is not, as the human perspective might suggest, the laughter of an empty ‘absolute beatitude’, but rather the hallmark of a full existence: the laughter of eternal forms.

Nietzsche, who in several respects was himself a victim of the titanic illusion, would say that it is precisely here that the profoundness of the ancient and Classical soul lies.

All this pertains to the mythical domain. But mythology is not a rambling fantasy. Myth in this context — leaving aside what I have argued in a previous chapter with regard to the strictly metaphysical and atemporal dimensions of myth — is ‘the mirror of profound experiences that shape civilisations’. The ideas just evoked point in two directions by suggesting the other possibility, the opposite orientation from that embodied by the Promethean and titanic myth which humanism embraces.

The mythological framework — Zeus, gods, divine bonds of kinship, etc. — should not obscure the essential point by eliciting any fanciful feeling of unfamiliarity and anachronism. In principle, the spirit always has the possibility of orienting itself according to one or the other of these two opposite conceptions, and of drawing from this a yardstick as well as an underlying tone for its existence. The ‘Olympian’ orientation is just as possible as the Promethean one.

Spiritual Virility

Leaving ancient symbols and myths aside, it can translate into a way of being, a well-defined attitude to internal and external events, to the human and spiritual world, to history and thought.

This orientation plays a crucial role in all that is truly aristocratic. As we have seen, Prometheanism instead has a fundamentally plebeian character and at best amounts to a sort of usurpation. In the ancient world — not just the Classical world, but the Indo-European one in general — all the main deities of sovereignty, of imperium, order, law and rights had a chiefly Olympian character. By contrast, the historical manifestation of the Promethean line is closely related to everything that attacked all forms of higher authority, which it tends to abusively replace with principles and values associated with the lower strata of the social organism. As already emphasised in other chapters, these strata correspond to the ‘physical’ and merely human part of the individual.

Of these two freedoms, that of the sovereign and that of the rebel, it is generally speaking the latter which humanism and Prometheanism choose.

This is true even when people purport to be celebrating the affirmation of human personality and its ‘dignity’, freedom of thought’, and the ‘boundlessness’ of the spirit.

Besides, this significant choice is clearly visible even in the more trivial forms of the revolutionary ideology. Let us suppose that traditional hierarchies really did possess the character suggested by this ideology, i.e. that they were not also based on a natural authority and free acknowledgement but only on might, and that for instance in the ‘dark Middle Ages’ man and human thought suffered in political and spiritual shackles. But in the person of whom? Certainly not that of the alleged despots, those who administer dogma and who, generally speaking, to paraphrase Aristotle, are not themselves subject to the law they prescribe.

These people were free. Thus even on this level it is clear what the foundation of the ‘noble ideologies’ of freedom and of the corresponding elective affinities is: an instinctual identification not with what is high but with what is low; an aspiration not towards the lord’s freedom but towards that of the emancipated slave (assuming that, in the periods under consideration, most of the men in question were actually slaves in the pejorative and distorted sense). Even if we were to accept such a materialistic, one-sided and largely fanciful picture of hierarchical societies, the plebeian foundation of social Prometheanism, the quality of its elective affinities and the ‘race of the spirit’ it betrays are unmistakable.

Ultimately, things are no different in the cultural domain, where humanism and Prometheanism have celebrated the emancipation of thought and glorified the spirit that ‘has broken all chains, becoming aware of its irrepressible freedom’. This has brought about a transition to rationalism, humanism and progressivism, often against the background of the aforementioned ‘tragic view of life’ and of the myth of Prometheus as a creator. It has fostered the illusion of the ‘achievements of thought’, particularly of the kind of thought that invents, builds, discovers — the applied thought of the ingenious and restless Titan of Antiquity.

What we have, then, is a movement from below that has led to the fading or destruction of what, in Western history and civilisation, was still associated with the opposite Apollonian pole of the aristocracy of the spirit, which is to say with the kind of sovereignty possessed by those who feel removed from the merely human, those who have the ‘civilisation of being’ (cf. Ch. 1) as their ideal, those whose lives and actions testify to a higher world and its calm — and not tragic — power.

Under the influence of increasingly rapid developments, ‘humanism’ was to follow the course leading from Prometheus to Epimetheus, to use the symbols just evoked. The modern world that is taking shape does not know Prometheus unbound in a positive sense, which is to say the Prometheus who has been unbound by Heracles (he who in Antiquity embodied man, the hero, who has made the other choice, that of allying himself with the Olympian powers).

The modern world only knows the Prometheus who has been unchained and allowed to go his own way, to bask in his misery and in the tragedy of a merely human existence — or, rather, an existence regarded from a merely human perspective. Ultimately, having lost the taste for this kind of self-sadism of ‘tragic greatness’, he plunges into the dull existence of Epimethean humanity. The latter, while surrounded by the splendid, titanic spectacle of the latest human achievements, only knows the kind of disciplines suited to animals of burden and the demonic rule of economics. The formula used by a well-known ideology is precisely ‘integral humanism’, meaning ‘labour humanism’, conceived as ‘the meaning of history’. With this, we have come full circle.

Freedom of Sex and Freedom from Sex

One defining feature of the present age is undoubtedly its emphasis on the realm of sex, combined with a regressive tendency that is evident to any keen observer. On the one hand, we see a struggle against the enduring moralistic and bourgeois limits to sexual life, and in psychology, sociology and philosophy an unprecedented degree of attention is being devoted to sex, verging on pansexualism and a sort of sex cult. On the other hand, this movement only approaches sex in its most trivial and ambiguous aspects — in this field too the predominant climate of ‘democracy’, promiscuity and decay is at work. Not only that, but starting from sex people have found a way to further the attack on the ideals, principles and structures of all higher forms of civilisation.

I have already discussed cases in which, in a certain kind of literature, the emphasis on sex is closely related to obscenity and the enjoyment of vulgarity. Leaving this aside, I will here examine how the tendency just outlined manifests itself in some contemporary authors, analysing its specific influences in terms of world-view, sociology and even political ideas. In particular, I will highlight the apparently paradoxical parallel between a sort of crusade in defence of sex and sexual freedom, and the drop in level occurring in the conception of sex.

We may start with an attempt to outline a morphology of civilisations and a historiography centred on sexuality. The range of perspectives according to which history has been interpreted more or less one-sidedly are well known: materialist or spiritualist interpretations, which privilege the economy or great personalities and heroes, sociological, dialectical, purely political interpretations, and so on. The only thing we were missing was an interpretation with a sexual or, to be more precise, sexual-psychoanalytical foundation. This gap has been bridged by an Englishman, G. Rattray Taylor, the author of a book entitled *Sex in History*.

Taylor is a Freudian, and given that according to Freudianism sex constitutes a predominant and decisive driving force in human beings, he came up with the idea that an in-depth study of history is only possible by setting out from sex and people's attitude to sex. Therefore, Taylor set out to highlight the close connections allegedly existing between the main social, religious and cultural currents that have emerged in history on the one hand, and the predominance of one or the other attitude to sex on the other.

In this respect, the key to Taylor's historiographical interpretation is the opposition between 'patrists' and 'matrists'. The starting point is provided by a number of real fixations among psychoanalysts and Freudians. As is well known, these people believe that the sexual impulse is at work from early childhood and that it may even take one's father or mother as its object. However, this is not mere eroticism but a tendency to identify with the object. Thus on the one hand we have the type who tends to identify with his father (being jealous, mistrustful and antagonistic towards his mother, which is to say the other sex); on the other, we have the type who tends to identify with his mother, with corresponding negative feelings towards his father. The concepts of 'patrism' and 'matrism' are defined on this basis, and the idea is advanced that these primordial complexes are at work in history. According to Taylor, history is a stage on which two different civilisations, cultures, mores, moralities, and outlooks on life have alternated, clashed or merged — two conceptions of life deriving from the fundamental attitude of the 'patrists' and 'matrists'.

Each of these two attitudes has complex implications, which Taylor defines in the following terms. 'Patrism' is associated with the religion of the father, patriarchal rights, authoritarianism in the political domain, conservatism in the socio-political domain, mistrust towards research and enquiry, intolerance in sexual matters, emphasis on the distinction between the sexes, curtailing of women's freedom, the idea of the inferiority and sinfulness of women, asceticism and the condemnation of sexual pleasure, fear of spontaneity, and the idea that mankind is evil by nature. By contrast, 'matrism' is associated with the religion of the mother, a tendency towards social interaction, democracy in the political domain, progressivism and innovative ideas, tolerance in sexual matters, the downplaying of the distinction between the sexes (but also a privileged position and freedom for women), hedonism and a tendency towards pleasure, spontaneity, and the idea that mankind is good by nature. We find evident points of contact here with natural law theory and Rousseau's ideas, as outlined in a previous chapter.

On top of all this we have the typical phobias displayed by each of the two tendencies in relation

to certain abnormal forms of sexuality — for example, matrists stigmatise incest in particular, and patrists homosexuality.

Here I will not dwell on the interpretation of the various historical ages that Taylor develops on the basis of these points of reference. The reader can easily imagine the one-sidedness of this kind of historiography. The Middle Ages fare worse of all, since they are presented as the stage for a repressive outburst of ‘patrism’ (embodied by the Catholic Church) and as the most striking combination of perversion, neurosis, hallucination, hysteria, arbitrariness and cruelty in history. However, medieval heresies are said to have often displayed a ‘matrist’ orientation: this is the case with the current of the Cathars, for instance, and even with that of the troubadours.

The creative and licentious Renaissance was also matrist, whereas the Reformation embodied a desperate reaction on the patrists’ part, in the face of the increasing ‘matrification’ of the Church. However, the Counter Reformation too was patrist, as was — obviously — Anglo-Saxon Puritanism.

By contrast, Romanticism was matrist, and according to Taylor (who is no doubt correct in this respect) contemporary society, especially in America, essentially tends towards matristism.

The most obvious objection to this kind of historiography — which combines a few intelligent observations and analyses with a great deal of rambling — is that it ultimately explains very little, since the starting point remains obscure. For it would be necessary to determine why one or the other orientation, the paternal or the maternal, prevails in the individual, or rather the child, depending on the historical period. Besides, like all Freudian views, Taylor’s represents a sort of caricature of some ideas that might even be valid when set in the right framework and given the right interpretation. Research, such as that carried out in the late 19th century by J. J. Bachofen (an author who is mentioned by Taylor yet assigned very little relevance), shows what an acceptable orientation might be.

I have already referred to this research elsewhere. It bears witness to the fruitfulness, for any morphological examination of ancient civilisations, of an interpretation setting out from that duality which on the human level manifests itself as the duality of the sexes. The difference lies in the fact that in the ancient world the starting point was metaphysics and the cosmos, not man understood in psychoanalytical terms with all his alleged complexes. Heaven and Earth, form and matter, spirit and nature, being and bios, the eternal masculine and the eternal feminine, along with other dyads, were conceived as transcendental principles, anterior and superior to man. Setting out from these principles one might even embark on an analysis of civilisations, history and mores akin to Taylor’s, while avoiding his absurd conclusions, one-sidedness and defiling explanations, that analyse what is higher in the light of what is lower. The opposition between civilisations of the father and civilisations of the mother, between androcratic and gynaecocratic societies (i.e. societies chiefly oriented towards the masculine pole or the feminine one), and between different cults, myths, ethics, political regimes, legal systems, forms of art, and so on, which may be traced back to these two opposite principles, is indeed at work in

history, in its dynamic currents, in its underlying tensions, and in the forms it takes. In investigations of this sort deviation starts when one turns sex into something absolute after having reduced it to a purely human fact, instead of grasping the deeper meanings its reflects, meanings which establish essential links between the mystery of sex and that of the primordial forces at work both in the universe and in the spirit.

We can now move on to briefly outline the theories of Wilhelm Reich, a Viennese pupil of Freud's who distanced himself from his master through a 'heterodox' re-evaluation of some of Freud's fundamental dogmas, making inroads into the general view of the world and the socio-political domain.

In their final form, Reich's ideas revolve around the concept of orgone or orgone energy (a term coined with reference to the orgasm — the sexual orgasm). The idea is that in sexuality and in sexual experiences a super individual energy manifests itself, a universal force. In principle, this is not wrong, and would lead us to a higher level than the one on which psychoanalysis operates. After all, a similar notion is expressed by a fundamental traditional teaching which has found its highest embodiment in the Hindu doctrine of kundalini: kundalini is a force — and not a merely biological force — that lies at the root of the human organism, and is related in particular to sex and the function of reproduction, as an immanent manifestation of the universal shakti in man. Shakti is one of the two terms in the aforementioned 'metaphysical dyad' or 'divine dyad'; it is the creative power of a god, figuratively represented as his 'bride'; it is a life-energy which represents the 'feminine' counterpart to the pure principle 'being', the 'divine male'.

This reference to traditional metaphysics is particularly important because, as we shall see, it clearly reveals how a confused intuition of something true in Reich is immediately associated with distortions and deviations. First of all, it must be noted that while Reich goes beyond the individual psychological level of current psychology and psychoanalysis and considers the super-individual level when he speaks of a cosmic 'orgone energy', he is not referring to the metaphysical level (as the traditional teaching just mentioned does). Rather, he searches for this power in the physical universe, in nature, as though it were a sort of electricity (indeed, he also speaks of a 'bio-electricity' and of the 'bion', conceived as an intermediate form between inorganic and organic matter), to the point that he believes it is suffused throughout the atmosphere. After conducting some expensive lab research on physical substances, he believed that he could even build 'orgone energy' condensers and 'orgone boxes' with therapeutic applications. Further developing the psychoanalytical theory of repression, Reich does not limit himself to arguing that neuroses, psychoses and other psychic disorders are caused by a stoppage or blocking ('stasis') of orgone energy due to obstructions ('armours') in an individual. These are essentially psychological and character obstructions, but they may also manifest themselves through muscular and physiological phenomena. But according to Reich even actual diseases of

the organism, including cancer, are traced back to the same cause.

This generalising of the theory of repression is also based on the idea that repression may be due not just to forced sexual abstinence, caused by external circumstances, but also to ‘orgastic impotence’, which is to be considered alongside other, commonly acknowledged forms of impotence (from erectile impotence to ejaculatory impotence). Orgastic impotence would be due to an anxiety in relation to pleasure, which prevents one from reaching a full sexual orgasm and creates a protective character ‘armour’, or defence barrier of the I, thereby causing the aforementioned blocking of orgone energy — the source of all ills.

On the basis of these assumptions, Reich develops an ad hoc interpretation of the whole history of civilised humanity, which in his view has been characterised for millennia by large-scale barriers and armours of the aforementioned sort against the complete ‘orgastic discharge’ which true life pushes us towards. He speaks of the ‘murder of life perpetrated by the armoured human animal’, and he identifies the ‘loss of paradise’ with the ‘loss of the full functioning of life in man’ (which is instead ensured when sexuality runs its full course). ‘Since, over the last millennia, all social life has been — for specific reasons — a kind of secondary armoured life which denies happiness [i.e. sexual happiness], it has made sure to eliminate and wipe out, through slander and degradation, all primary forms of life, which threaten its existence. It has realised in one way or the other ... that it would collapse and would cease to exist if primordial life made its comeback on the bio-sexual stage.’ This hate towards, and well-planned struggle against, the force of life — that is to say, orgone energy, which coincides with the fundamental force of life and nature — stands at the root of the various disorderly expressions of a repressed and frustrated vitality, down to extreme manifestations such as psychosis, crime, and alcoholism. The blocking of orgastic discharge also engenders destructive frenzy, which is to say — as a reaction to an unbearable pressure — the impulse towards evasion and the yearning for nirvana (as Reich conceives it) as a surrogate for the liberation ensured by full sexual satisfaction.

Reich ends up with a sort of religion of life centred on sexuality and with an ethics that calls for complete surrender to the same, while stigmatising the structures of all higher civilisations and societies as hysterical and neuropathic defensive armours. The counterpart to all this is the call for a ‘sexual revolution’. Here we clearly find the regressive quality which I have already highlighted in relation to all this modern sexology, with the flawed and one-sided conception that constitutes its foundation. Precisely for this reason, I previously recalled the traditional teaching that acknowledges a primordial force as the root of sexuality, but as one of the poles of the metaphysical dyad: the ‘feminine’ principle of pure life and nature — shakti or prakrti — that has its counterpart in the principle of ‘being’, Shiva or purusha.

Theories such as Reich’s therefore represent a one-sided, anarchic adoption and absolutisation of what is only one of the two principles of the world. The result is the promoting of complete, unbridled sexual release, against everything which, in principle, is not at all the consequence of a ‘neuropathic armour’, but which rather usually corresponds to the action of the ‘masculine’ pole of that dyad on the human level — according to the mythical image of the male god who is the

lord of shakti, which is to say the primordial life-force, and who finds his manifestation in everything that embodies ‘form’ in a higher sense, in all centrality and order above the level of nature.

One of the consequences of Reich’s failure to realise all this (a failure evidently caused by his personal equation) is that he necessarily finds himself faced with an impenetrable mystery: for even if we were to grotesquely interpret all ethical, political, social and religious forms as barriers against ‘life’ and the cosmic organic impulse, given that these forms exist and somehow are part of life, we can only wonder what their true, profound origin might be. Reich admits his ignorance on the matter. He writes: ‘The problem of how the human species, alone among all animal species, developed its armouring remains unsolved.’ He gives up on the problem because ‘it is too complicated: the concrete facts that might offer a solution lie in an all too remote past’. Actually, there is no need to provide an empirical historical explanation; rather, it would be necessary to elucidate, *a priori*, this possibility which manifests itself with such power and constancy in the human species in the face of that Life which Reich conceives as the one primordial foundation of the universe. The only real explanation lies in the existence of the other pole of the cosmic dyad, the principle personified in myth by the male deity, superordinate to the female one. This principle is at work in man, society and civilisation with an equally primordial power in all those areas where Reich only sees products of the armoured type suffering from orgiastic impotence and hysterically opposed to sex — the ‘murderer of life’.

Even if we were to focus on the emotional factor — which hardly exerts a universal influence of the sort required by the totality of things it is supposed to account for — of the anxiety of the I vis-à-vis sexual pleasure, we would have to explain this anxiety. In one passage Reich speaks of the ‘fear of dissolving into pleasure’. Man ‘from the very beginning must have felt that his genital impulse made him lose control and reduced him to a flowing and convulsive fragment of nature. It may well be that this is the origin of orgasm anxiety’, which must be identified as the origin of the religious condemnation of sexuality. Now, we are far here from any sort of pathology: what might be at play is simply the legitimate need to preserve one’s personality against a complete, passive and naturalistic surrender to sex, which would represent an impairment and dissolution. Reich also writes: ‘Orgiastic desire ... now appears as an expression of this “drive beyond oneself” We tend to go beyond ourselves. Herein, perhaps, lies the solution to the problem of why the idea of death is so often used to refer to the orgasm. In death too biological energy (sic) escapes the boundaries of the material sheath that imprisons it. The religious idea of a “liberating death”, of a “liberating passing away”, thus acquires an objective basis. The function which in a normal organism is fulfilled by the orgasm reappears in the armoured organism as the principle of nirvana, or the mystical idea of salvation.’ This is another example of a typical misunderstanding. The intuition is correct as regards the impulse towards transcendence which is intrinsic to eroticism and which manifests itself in the experience of intercourse (in its ‘destructive’ aspects, which however usually fall outside of these authors’ primitivistic conception of sexuality). However, this is something quite different from a ‘biological energy’ — a biological energy which is brought into play in relation to death itself,

through the ‘flesh’ and ‘body’ from which the armoured type seeks to break free, ‘redeeming himself’. This is seen not as a reflection of his nature as a finite being in general, but as his very ‘armour’, ‘the fabric which imprisons’ that energy, preventing its ‘natural’ solution, orgastic discharge. Reich completely ignores the distinction between passive transcendence (which it is opportune to avoid) and genuine, active and ascending transcendence (in relation to which a particular use of sex is also called for in traditional teachings — see the material gathered in my work *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*). The surrender of the I and the discharging of the cosmic orgone energy in the individual through a complete orgasm: this is the limit of Reich’s view of life and ethics.

After all this, let us examine in what way, in particular, Reich attacks the forms taken by Traditional society, based on his redefinition of Freud’s theories. Freud had set out from the idea that the pleasure drive, the Lustprinzip, is the fundamental driving force of the human psyche. Later, however, he also came to acknowledge the existence of another equally basic drive, the drive towards destruction (*Todestrieb*).

197 Moreover, he developed a general theory of repression, to show that when the pathways to the satisfaction of the latter drive, the destructive drive, are barred, it changes level and finds two possible manifestations: if it turns outwards, towards others, it becomes sadism; if it turns inwards, towards oneself, it becomes masochism. Reich instead denies Freud’s duality of drives. In his view what is primary is only the orgastic pleasure drive, the discharge of primordial orgone energy. The other drive, the drive towards destruction, in its twofold sadistic and masochistic aspects, merely derives from it: it only emerges following the repression of the former drive, when social structures, inhibitions and orgastic impotence give rise to a complex accumulation of power which, through a deviation, manifests itself in a destructive sexopathic fashion, through sadism or masochism. The transposition of these sexopathic forms is what shapes the main features of a given type of society.

On the socio-political level, sadistic impulses, according to Reich, produce the authoritarian personality tendency, with a desire to dominate those under one’s control and with the releasing of the destructive drive through the persecution of one’s enemies (the ‘capitalist’, the ‘Jew’, the ‘Communist’, and so on, depending on the ideology). Instead, masochistic impulses give rise to the tendency towards a herd-like attitude, with the enjoyment of submission, a tendency towards ‘personality worship’, discipline, and even self-sacrifice. These two tendencies, the active and the passive one, are complementary in a way. According to Reich, they constitute the underlying foundation of all hierarchical systems and show that warrior tendencies, ‘aggressive’ attitudes, and so on, are phenomena with a clear sexopathic origin. Reich here lumps together the patriarchy, militaristic regimes, ‘Fascist’ ones, capitalism, Soviet communism (insofar as it is authoritative), and so on — more or less, the ‘patriots’ world described by Rattray Taylor.

Some people have even sought to draw upon ethnology to find confirmation of these theories. Malinowski and an American-girl-turned ethnologist, Margaret Mead, have compared two savage peoples living in similar environmental circumstances: one, which was matriarchal and

granted full sexual freedom from childhood, led a peaceful life, free of neuroses or other disorders, while the other, which had a patriarchal and authoritarian family organisation and limited sexual freedom, presented ‘the same traits as European civilisation’: aggressiveness, individualism, a warrior impulse, etc. Entirely sporadic observations of this sort, which rashly draw causal links, are certainly revealing for whomever takes it for granted that what is higher ought to be explained on the basis of what is lower — that civilised mankind ought to be explained on the basis of savages — and who ignore Dumézil’s wise observation that, with a little effort, it is possible to find confirmation for just about anything in ethnology.

However, as regards ‘aggressiveness’, conceived as a sort of rabid fury due to a suppressed pleasure drive, Reich and other people who hold similar views (like De Marchi, an author we shall soon be discussing) fail to explain the sexual social inhibitions or fear of losing oneself in pleasure that affects many dangerously aggressive wild animals. Furthermore, it would be ridiculous to seriously think that men like Alexander, Timur, Caesar, Napoleon or Frederick II would never have existed, had they received an adequate and uninhibited sexual education, outside a patriarchal family and ‘armoured’ society. It is indeed strange that practically no great conqueror, on a personal level, led a puritan life — unless Reich wishes to assume that, even though they made use of women, these great conquerors all suffered from ‘orgastic impotence’. This is all foolish nonsense, and the regressive existential background of this kind of sexology applied to the interpretation of societies is evident. I do not wish to turn these authors’ interpretative method against them by arguing that the impulse which has led them to pollute and degrade the forms of a higher civilisation — which always go hand in hand with the principles of authority, hierarchy, virility, discipline and a warrior style (not to be confused with hysterical ‘aggressiveness’ and ‘imperialism’) — betrays, in the light of an analytical pseudo-science and a pansexual and unbridled view of life, precisely an unconscious aggressive instinct (either a sadistic or masochistic one), nor do I wish to conclude that Reich and other authors of his ilk are themselves in need of undergoing psychoanalysis and of being straightened out. It goes without saying that the inclination to command or to obey is inborn and usually has nothing to do with sexual matters: the libido dominandi and the libido servandi are merely degenerative forms of this.

Self-overcoming distinguishes both those in a position of authority who exercise their power as a duty and those who freely establish a relation of dependence, subordination and loyalty with a superior, as illustrated by the best aspects of the feudal world, both in Europe and beyond.

Secondly, this confirms what I mentioned at the beginning, namely that, contrary to what might seem to be the case, the background to these theories is a primitive and rather trivial conception of sex. Indeed, when Reich — against Freud — sets out to explain sadism and masochism as merely secondary sexopathic forms due to repression, he falls into a serious misunderstanding, insofar as he proves his ignorance of the actual dimensions of the sexual drive itself, taken in its deeper and most intense manifestations. While, in general, sadism and masochism do exist as perversions, they may also be simply the accentuation of aspects that are always to be found in

any intense experience of sexual love, which entails a destructive element (with the impulse towards ‘transcendence’ that Reich only fleetingly and inadequately grasped). The themes of love-death and pleasure-destruction are not at all mere romantic and decadent psychopathic projections. They occur throughout the history of eroticism. For instance, many ancient deities governing sex, pleasure and orgies were at the same time conceived as deities of death and destructive frenzy. One might mention here — among others — the goddess Ishtar for the Mediterranean area, the goddess Durga for the Hindu one, and the goddess Hathor-Sekhmet for Egypt: all of these, in one of their aspects, were goddesses both of death and of destructive frenzy (which also, incidentally, applies to Dionysianism).

On account of this other side, some of these deities were also goddesses of war. Rather ironically, then, these calls for complete sexual freedom have as their counterpart, or indeed premise, their conceiving the sexual impulse itself — which is established as the foundation of everything — in the most incomplete and uninteresting terms.

Luigi De Marchi, an Italian author with much the same ideas as Rattray Taylor and Reich (to the point that he has introduced and promoted the latter in Italy by publishing a translation of selected extracts entitled *La teoria dell’orgasmo*), has written a book entitled *Sesso e Civiltà*.

The background, determined by his personal equation, is always the same: while De Marchi lacks the general doctrinal points of references required to clearly examine many historical and spiritual aspects of sexuality, he displays the same animosity towards the ideals and structures of higher civilisations — an animosity which takes as its counterpart the call for promiscuous and naturalistic sexual freedom. In themselves, some of De Marchi’s criticisms and suggestions for reform are acceptable. However, he slips into real absurdities on account of the egalitarian level to which he refers, in relation to which he displays an apostle’s zeal. It may be useful to examine some of the ideas of this author, in order to define and develop some of the points already made in greater detail, and finally to wrap up the whole question.

Most of De Marchi’s book is devoted to denouncing the ‘sexophobic’ complex, both in itself and in its historical manifestations. Without much difficulty, De Marchi shows that the idea of sexuality as something invariably shameful, sinful, impure and opposed to all spiritual values is, ultimately, an anomaly, since in the fields of history and ethnology peoples and civilisations are known that were ignorant of this notion, and even acknowledged the sacredness of sex. As previously acknowledged, it is certainly right to reject the puritanical and sexophobic equation between erotic repression and civilisation. Vilfredo Pareto had already made this point, adducing concrete examples to show that it is not at all true that a certain degree of freedom in sexual mores necessarily entails the decay and dissolution of all higher virtues in peoples or individuals, but that great historical figures also come into play here.

While the idea in question is generally correct, certain reservations must be voiced with regard to De Marchi’s attempt to look for supporting evidence among savage peoples, which is to say in ethnographic material.

Rather, one ought to limit the enquiry to higher civilisations, for two reasons: first of all because — it is worth repeating this once more — primitive peoples are not at all primordial peoples but, by and large, degenerate residues of primordial mankind and futureless side branches that have become detached from the central trunk of the human race and lost; secondly, because it would be easy to show that ‘primitive peoples’ often have inhibiting sexual taboos that are even worse than those of bourgeois society.

However, it is more important to note that in the context of actual civilisations certain distinctions are to be drawn. It is clear that the object of De Marchi’s attention and sympathy is almost exclusively represented by the kind of civilisations and societies that Rattray Taylor calls ‘matrist’ and Bachofen calls gynaecocratic, Aphroditean or Demetrian. These civilisations and societies are characterised not by the mere acknowledgement of the value or even sacredness of sex, i.e. by anti sexophobia, but rather by a naturalistic surrender to sex, by a ‘physical’ world-view that rules out transcendence, by the pre-eminence of women, and by a levelling promiscuity, with a pacifist orientation.

In a previous chapter I pointed to the inner connection between the spirit of these degraded civilisations and ‘natural law’, which in Rome stood under the sign of female and plebeian deities.

It is important to note that those who have established a relation between the decay of a civilisation and sexual promiscuity often refer to the spread of an Aphroditean, ‘feminine’ and devirilising sexuality of this sort. So one should not simply speak of One only needs to leaf through De Marchi’s book to realise that his anti sexophobic polemic rests on an ideal and world-view connected precisely to the naturalistic kind of civilisation just mentioned.

For instance, he praises certain aspects of Etruscan civilisation (which closely recall the ‘naturalistic communion’ of some primitive peoples of the South Seas), by comparison to which the Romans may be seen as the ‘Prussians of their age’ (a rather fitting expression borrowed from R. Aldington, but which could also be inverted by arguing that, in various respects, the Prussians were the Romans of their age, since they also reproduced some of the latter’s fundamental virtues). Here the most serious fallacy comes to light, which invalidates everything which might be considered valid and acceptable in De Marchi’s views: the idea — already affirmed by Rattray Taylor, as we have seen — that phenomena like sexophobic moralism, disdain for women and puritan repression are necessarily to be found in every virile, patriarchal, anti democratic and warrior society. This is sheer nonsense.

Rather, the point must be made that higher civilisations rejected all egalitarianism, cultivated strict ethical and warrior values, and kept women in their rightful place by denying them the role they play in Aphroditean and Demetrian societies, but without slipping thereby into puritan sexophobia. Since when is it true that ‘in all militaristic civilisations there has never been any room for love’ (to quote De Marchi)? Myth itself associates Mars and Venus, and it is a fact that all real women will always be more attracted to warriors than to the ambiguous, drunken virility

of the Corybant.

Likewise, even in ordinary life it is a well-known fact that women are attracted to men in uniform.

Moreover, it is one thing to put women in their rightful place, quite another to be moralistic misogynists. The subordination of women in all normal and androcratic civilisations does not imply any contempt or humiliation.

Thousands of years of history also teach us that, generally speaking, women were quite happy in this position of alleged inferiority (pace Pierre Loti and his *Désenchantées*), and were capable of fulfilling their potential as ‘absolute women’ and to develop an *ars amandi* that the emancipated women of today can hardly imagine; nor did they dream of any ‘vindication’ before the ‘agitation’ of recent years, akin to that which the so-called stirrers of ‘class consciousness’ have spread, like a virus, among the lower social strata.

Therefore, the fact that in certain civilisations sex received some acknowledgement and was even assigned some worth in the domain of the sacred does not mean that we should focus exclusively on those contexts in which all this led to the inferior, regressive, ‘Aphroditean’ and naturalistic forms just outlined. Rather, it is necessary to contend that in every complete traditional civilisation such forms were avoided, as ascetic and warrior values were cultivated alongside erotic ones, in relation to different paths and vocations. Thus in India, for example, we find the ‘path of desire’ (*kama-marga*), alongside the path of knowledge (*vidya-marga*), that of high ascesis (*tapas-marga*) and that of action (*karma-marga*).

Not just India but also China and Islam illustrate the coexistence of an ‘androcratic’ regime, i.e. one resting on male supremacy and on a highly developed erotic life. De Marchi too is forced to acknowledge this in the case of Islam, a civilisation marked by ‘the extreme supremacy of men and almost complete nullification of woman’ (I have already commented on this alleged ‘nullification’) and, at the same time, by a considerable emphasis on love and sexuality. To this one should add the warrior character of Islam (its ‘aggressiveness’, to use De Marchi and Reich’s terminology). Besides, one may refer to the case of ancient Rome, not just to note the dignity attributed to women, particularly as matriarchs, by these ‘Prussians of their age’, but also to make sure that puritanical sexophobia is not conflated with the need for measure, for a certain distance, for a certain masculine dignity. Cato himself, who is accused of ‘militarist extremism’ by De Marchi on account of his *Delenda Carthago*, exemplifies a tolerant yet dignified approach: as Pareto recalls, during the celebration of the *Floralia* he discretely withdrew instead of preaching fire and brimstone, lest the people be deprived of the sight of naked young women which these celebrations usually entailed; and when he noticed a young man trying to hide after leaving a brothel, not wishing to be seen, Cato told him that there was nothing to be ashamed of, provided he did not make such places his home.

It goes without saying that De Marchi launches a massive attack against the sexophobia of Christianity and of the Christian civilisation, adducing evidence of all sorts, much along the same

lines as Rattray Taylor: a theological hatred of sex, repression, mortification of the ‘flesh’ as the enemy of the spirit, and a conception of marriage almost as a regrettable necessity — a balm for the disease of lust (Augustine), tolerated only in view of reproduction. This sexophobic orientation only became even more accentuated in Protestantism and Calvinism. However, it is first necessary to clearly determine what is at stake in order to ascertain whether one can speak of a deviation here. The deviation essentially derives from a misunderstanding. The pre-Christian and non-Christian world, as we have seen, often did not deny sex at all, or even assigned it a sacred and mystical character; however, it did not regard it as the only path allowing man to grasp the higher meaning of life, the only path leading him beyond the confines of his individuality, towards transcendence. For the most part, as a means to this goal, the path of ascesis and detachment was recommended, which is suitable only for some people and presupposes a particular qualification and vocation (besides, the same is true of the possibilities offered by sex, when a higher goal is what we have in mind). Those who follow this path must of course steer clear of sex and women, and regard these as a danger. Their precept will be abstinence, not as a repression and ‘mortification of the flesh’, but as an objective method to release a fundamental force of man and apply it to a different end.

Now, the misunderstanding on the part of Christianity lies in the fact that it establishes ascetic values as the foundation of a morality to be imposed on everyone: not only those who aspire towards other-wordly transcendence, but also those who live within the world and of whom one can expect, not an ascetic negation of existence, including sex, but only, at most, a certain ‘sacralisation’ of it. Besides, the same misunderstanding also lies at the basis of various other norms of original Christian morality, which can only apply in the field of ascetic disciplines — in fact, only in relation to ascetic disciplines of a particular sort. These norms include turning the other cheek, imitating the lilies of the valley, hating one’s father, mother and siblings, leaving everything, and so on: precepts which outside the ascetic domain are sheer nonsense. Similar considerations apply to the indissolubility of ritual and sacramental marriage: as I have noted elsewhere, this can only concern an exceptional type of union, which is also known to other civilisations (at times even in more radical forms of ‘heroic’ indissolubility, as in the case of the woman following her husband in death). They do not apply to the kind of union established by the overwhelming majority of men and women — particularly in ages in which religion has ceased to be a living power, and, more than ever before, in bourgeois society. All the distortions, absurdities and pathological and puritanical forms of sexophobia that De Marchi denounces in his extensive overview of the history of sexual mores in the Christian area simply derive from this unwarranted conflating of very distinct domains. But at the same time one must, yet again, acknowledge the one-sidedness of a conception that extols sex alone and sees ascetic values as nothing but inhibitory and self-sadistic phenomena.

Take the classic example of Shivaism: Shiva, the deity at the centre of certain orgiastic forms of worship, is also the god of ascetics, and his emblem, the lingam (phallus) is even worn by them because it symbolises not just reproductive, priapic animal virility, but also the spiritual virility at work in ascetics.

It is indisputable that, on account of the misunderstanding just discussed, Christianity is responsible for the Western distortion of the correct way of judging sex and its related problems. However, truly negative phenomena, in this respect, only emerged when the Western world started reducing religion to mere morality and came to approach the bourgeois age. It is then that ‘virtuism’ (the religion of ‘virtue’) emerged, to use a fitting expression by Pareto, who associates it with other ‘secular religions’ that are just as fanatical as the dogmatic ones: the religions of Progress, Democracy, Humanity, and so on. Before all this, the situation was not as grim as De Marchi and other authors suggest when they examine the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the 18th century. The Middle Ages were also marked by considerable sexual freedom and uninhibitedness. We know of the promiscuity associated with bathing, and we know that in castles — for the sake of hospitality — young women were expected to keep knights company in bed. Knightly epics also frequently mention women and girls taking the first step in sexual matters (something which should thrill De Marchi — see p. 252 of his book — but which, frankly, is a form of impudence which the differentiated type of man will not find very arousing).

Finally, one — not wholly unpleasant — aspect of the golden age of knighthood and the wars of religion was the raping of reluctant women in conquered cities. One should also speak of so-called ‘Platonic love’ in the Middle Ages and of its ‘mystery’, because it is in fact something very different from what De Marchi and Rattray Taylor suppose and what we read in textbooks on literature and customs: as I have noted in my book *Eros and the Mysteries of Love*, these were often special forms of erotic initiation, with aspects unknown to ‘simple and natural love’, which is to say primitively carnal love, based on a ‘complete orgasmic discharge’, to use Reich’s terminology.

De Marchi does not find much sexual freedom in the Renaissance and even in the 18th century, Casanova’s century.

Here another absurd aspect of his ideas emerges. He states that we should not be misled by the proverbial frivolity of the 18th century, since ‘corruption’ and licentiousness were confined to an exclusivist class that ‘took advantage of its hermetic isolation and age-old privileges’, while formally honouring traditional social values and indeed attacking anyone who criticised them or ‘sought to free the popular masses from their yoke’. Here a few rectifications must be made; it should be noted, first of all, that this was often not so much a matter of hypocrisy as it later became in bourgeois society, as of a certain degree of irony, a certain detachment, with the veneer of good taste required by any free but not vulgar sexuality. However, generally speaking, it is most important to acknowledge that while a certain higher human type can afford a greater sexual freedom, it would be a terrible mistake to extend this freedom to everyone; and this not because of some artificial social privilege but because of the dangerous consequences that such freedom is bound to have for ordinary men and women. Even in Classical Antiquity we find the saying that ‘not everyone can go to Kythera’.

It is always absurd to attack sexual taboos in the name of a democratically indiscriminate sexual freedom. Yet this is precisely De Marchi’s approach. He even criticises Romantics like Byron

and Nietzsche: for they rebelled and affirmed a nonconformist freedom ‘beyond good and evil’ for a privileged few, for exceptional beings, instead of promoting a renewal and general reform in sexual mores. Once again, this is utter nonsense: when freedom is extended to all, it is destined to result in licentiousness, dissoluteness and sheer, unbridled bestiality. Nietzsche himself had the final say on this, which is valid for all times, when he observed that the extent to which an individual can allow himself certain things, without falling into ‘corruption’ or ‘decadence’, is determined by his power to renounce them through the capacity to restrain himself at every moment.

Clearly, this only ever applies to a minority. But I will say more about this later on.

As elsewhere, in his analysis of Romanticism and the literature of Crepuscular and Decadent authors from the late 19th century De Marchi mixes right and wrong ideas. In his view, these currents did not achieve any ‘progress’ because they often exalted sex, yet only as a transgression, thereby implicitly acknowledging the negative and sinful character attributed to it by the puritanical conception — even exacerbating this character by associating sex with crime, cruelty, and perversion. De Marchi here speaks of an ‘attempted sadistic escape from the grip of taboos’ (we once again find Reich’s quirks on the origins of sadism), of a phenomenon that ultimately has a psychopathic character: ‘sexuality remains a sin — indeed, the sin par excellence’ — except that it is enjoyed precisely for this reason. De Marchi is right in his criticism, insofar as doing something only because it is forbidden and ‘bad’ implies precisely an acknowledgement of the very criteria that lead most people to abstain from it. Yet one should not go any further than this: it is necessary to realise that a danger emerges the moment in which all tensions have been removed and everything seems lawful and natural. As for ‘sadism’, which may well not be sexopathic, I have already discussed it.

We then come across not just absurdities but outrageous blunders, as when De Marchi describes the political transpositions of ‘Romantic sadistic psychosis’ in the form of the myth of the superman (notwithstanding all its problematic features) and when he applies the alleged equation between ‘sexophobic moralism and militaristic imperialism’ to currents such as Fascism, National Socialism, and so on. As regards Fascism, it would be difficult to deny that it presented many moralistic and bourgeois aspects and sexual prejudices not unlike those of the Christian democratic regime that is governing Italy at the time in which I am writing these lines. But what is most unbelievable is that De Marchi criticises the fact that ‘when he wished to discredit persons and peoples Mussolini would accuse them of being feminine.’ I wonder if De Marchi would have been flattered if I had opened my observations with the words: the same tendency is reflected by the book *Sesso e Civiltà* by the feminine, or effeminate, writer De Marchi. All this once again confirms the fact that this author conflates sexuality and promiscuity, given that the evident implication of his criticism of Mussolini is that being ‘feminine’ is an excellent thing, and not a degeneration, for a man (the logical counterpart to this being that it is an excellent thing for a woman to be masculine). Besides, what may partly be true as regards a certain degree of bourgeois puritanism exhibited by Fascism, does not really apply to National Socialism. Let

us leave Hitler's personality aside here — although, once again, one wonders why De Marchi would want to quote Hitler's saying, 'the masses are like women', as evidence of his 'hysterical misogyny', given that women gladly obey real men and shun the weak (unfortunately, one should speak not of women but of whores today — as is shown, among many other things, by the transition from the 'oceanic gatherings' of the past to the current infatuation with democracy in Italy and Germany). Besides, Germany happily enjoyed a wide degree of sexual freedom under National Socialism, which even coined the motto *Das Kind adelt die Frau* to defend unmarried mothers, and which was the only regime in the modern world that had the courage to pursue certain ideas expressed, among others, by Plato in *The Republic* — something that De Marchi should be enthusiastic about, given that he calls for the establishment of 'free love circles and communities'.

Based on the idea that war operates a reverse selection, insofar as it chiefly cuts down a country's best, strongest and bravest men, Germany, to compensate for this in view of posterity, created three colonies during the War in which racially suitable girls could meet an elite of soldiers on leave. If sexual relationships were established, the couples could choose whether to marry or not. The State would take care of any children born through a special SS institution called *Lebensborn*.

It is clear, then, that De Marchi's antifascist assumptions led him to seriously one-sided views.

Other parts of De Marchi's book offer some acceptable criticism. For example, De Marchi psychoanalyses the creator of psychoanalysis, Freud, detecting in his 'science' a sort of smug revenge against the sexual taboos of which he himself was a passive victim, combined with the pleasure of polluting. On account of this, Freud, just like the Puritans, only saw the lowlier and dirtier aspects of sex. De Marchi states that Freud provides final 'scientific' confirmation 'of the satanic, filthy and evil nature of sex so emphatically preached by traditional religion and morality'; hence his conception of the human condition is even more gloomy than the Christian one 'since it lacks the ray of expiation and salvation'. De Marchi opportunely recalls Maurice Blondel's verdict on Freud: 'He saw the pig in man, and made him a sad pig'.

Along the same lines, De Marchi criticises

a whole range of contemporary writers and novelists, down to Moravia and those of his ilk, who wallow in the same mire with their negative and distorted view of sex, which is highlighted in its basest aspects.

Naturally, it would be all too easy to attack the mores of bourgeois society, and in particular those of the two 'world powers', Soviet Russia and America. De Marchi is right to note the sexual 'virtuism' that today brings together opposite political movements: it constitutes a sort of unspoken and unquestioned dogma which is not affected by all the calls for reform or revolution which certain exponents of these movements make in many other domains. As De Marchi states, the French Revolution, Socialism and Syndicalism were all sexophobic and puritanical; after the first stages of the Communist revolution, the Stalinist regime too towed the same line: the

tendency here is to reduce the sphere of sex to a mere ‘accident’, to something devoid of any ‘decadent complications’, to a ‘healthy’ physical act which male and female comrades can resort to as a much needed release the ‘free’ woman here is essentially reduced to her role as a worker and mother. All passion and profoundness are excluded from erotic love, for the sake of the ‘Soviet motherland’ and of various economic plans. De Marchi argues that Soviet Russia today has reached puritanical results that are more brilliant and on a wider scale than those ever reached by the clergy.

Communist China has gone even further.

Equally correct is De Marchi’s analysis of American mores and the profound unease that, all appearances aside, plagues life in the United States as far as sex is concerned. The origin of this trouble lies in the early Puritanical conception, which idealised woman on a sexophobic basis. As late as the Victorian period, woman was conceived as a superior, spiritual being. The ‘supposition’ that women could experience sexual emotions, or yield to them and derive pleasure from them, was considered insulting. A cliché of ‘dignity’ and loftiness was thus imposed on women, who accepted it. In conjunction with female emancipation, this gave rise to a host of sexually inhibited, half-anaesthetised and frustrated beings, who find their counterpart in the materialist male that lets himself be dominated by women and ‘respects’ them in the most inane sense of the term, or — as a reaction conforms to the stereotype of the ‘tough guy’, of the violent man, or of the gangster surrounded by ‘babes’. Hence the lack of any meaningful encounter between the two parts, the two sexes. Hence, too, a whole series of counterbalances and outbursts, starting from the excesses of the beatniks, alcohol abuse, the frenzied enthusiasm for Jazz, and so on — which only worsens the situation.

The reader can easily imagine what De Marchi says when he focuses his enquiry on Italian mores. However, it is rather odd that he practically ignores central Europe and the Nordic countries, as well as a certain part of France, where the situation is quite different and approaches a somewhat satisfactory standard when it comes to well-informed sexual mores, marked by clarity and camaraderie.

Nevertheless, when De Marchi switches from his critique in the historical and more general field to the problem of sex in the present day, and attempts to lay down a new sexual morality, on the one hand he shows his ignorance of the actual situation, particularly as regards countries like Italy; on the other, absurdities emerge due to his failure to draw distinctions in relation to this ethics, which he applies to just anyone. Meanwhile, as regards certain related questions, De Marchi is in favour of divorce: here one can only agree with him, given what, in bourgeois society, the idea of an ‘indissoluble union’ championed by the Catholic Church — actually on the basis of the misunderstanding I previously highlighted — amounts to in practical terms.

Secondly, he is in favour of birth control, which is something I can agree with, but not without noting a certain incongruity, since in practice most of the safest birth-control measures do not agree with the idea of naturalistic and instinctive sexual spontaneity upheld by De Marchi.

Again, one can agree with De Marchi when he opposes prostitution, seeing it as the logical counterpart to the present bourgeois virtuous regime, and concludes that the most effective way to overcome it would be: female emancipation + sexual freedom. Indeed, professional prostitution is very limited in central and northern European countries, insofar as this double condition has been fulfilled to some extent.

As far as sexual ethics is concerned, while a system of less conformism, greater sincerity and courage, greater realism, and clarity between the two sexes is desirable, one should not surpass a certain limit, especially by applying certain principles to everyone indiscriminately. As I have said, the prospect of a higher freedom in the field of sex can only be considered in relation to the ethics of a minority, whose inner structure shields them from the kind of dangers that this freedom would pose to other people.

It is almost comical on De Marchi's part to include sexual freedom among 'social demands' and the 'inalienable rights of the human person', alongside freedom of opinion, of worship, of assembly, of residence, and all the other fine 'achievements' of democracy, which would actually hardly be inclined to dispute this 'demand'. Here, as elsewhere, it is worth recalling the words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who was concerned not with freedom from something (i.e. restrictions) but with freedom for something, i.e. with the use of freedom, and who recalled that many people lose their last value the moment they cast off all yokes.

Free for what? To restore the climate of the ancient 'Aphroditean' societies, with their promiscuous, naturalistic, pacifist and humanitarian foundation and with the tacit and almost fatal pre-eminence they assign women?

Besides, certain sectors of contemporary society are approaching an atmosphere of widespread and chronic sensuality, through a constant and insidious alluring of men on the part of sex and women, leading to the decay of all superior virile values and true spirituality, in line with what has always occurred at the final, twilight stages of many cycles of civilisation.

Indiscriminate sexual freedom is all the more dangerous for a people such as the Italian one, which by race — rather than simply as a consequence of traditional prejudices — hardly has the best dispositions in the sexual field. For example, more sophisticated types aside, young Italian women find it almost impossible to move beyond the alternative between the bimbo and the vulgar type.

It is easy to speak of economic emancipation and sexual freedom as an antidote to prostitution: in actual fact, the only case in which this freedom does not prove detrimental is when women have acquired a special personality, something they have not even started to do today, despite all the achievements and demands of women on the material and practical level. In Italy the last War has merely led to a rise in petty, trivial or mercenary corruption. A recent survey on Italian call girls has found that the dominant outlook among them is no different from that of girls from the petite bourgeoisie who are in search of a husband and eager to 'settle down' — it is not at all the outlook of the young woman who aspires towards a greater, nonconformist freedom, and who

makes use of it.

But even in the best case scenario, if we follow the views of De Marchi and other similar authors, the prospect is a transition from a gloomy, sadistic and puritanical sexophobia to a merry carelessness worthy of wild animals in ‘nature’. What to think of De Marchi’s suggestion that free sexuality is a recipe to increase sociability and mutual fellowship? Or his idea that one of the reasons why there is an urgent need for a sexual reform based on free love is the problem of how ‘workers’ will spend their spare time, when they will have so much of it thanks to the new technological advances? This is a fine perspective: a sensuous civilisation and ‘Dionysianism’ steeped in the atmosphere of today’s after-work recreational centres or, even better, of their German equivalent in the past, *Kraft durch Freude* (‘Strength through joy’) a formula that would seem to fittingly sum up the social aims of De Marchi’s sexology. Ultimately, his utopianism only confirms the fact that he fails to grasp the more interesting, intense, transcendental and hence dangerous aspects that the sexual experience can present in the case of differentiated types of men and young women. De Marchi makes references such as: ‘The problem was not to destroy the sensualising and dramatising of sexual facts by reducing these to essential physiological functions; rather, it was to exploit them for non-inhibitory and non-repulsive purposes’. He also acknowledges that the movement of reform seeking to promote the innocence of the naked female body by desexualising it, by detaching it from its sexual significance, ‘strips sexuality even of that demonic power that it preserved in the Christian tradition.’ Yet De Marchi opens these windows, only to close them immediately.

As one last point, let us consider, in particular, the demand for pre-marital and extra-marital sexual freedom, which is intended to do away with possessive sexual exclusiveness and the accompanying complex of jealousy.

In relation to this, De Marchi’s ideas can be associated with the views regarding a ‘new sexual ethics’ expounded by an Argentinian author of Yugoslav origin, Bosco Nedelcovic, in an open letter by this title, which he has also circulated in an Italian translation.

Nedelcovic’s purported starting point is a conception of sexual life which does not reduce it ‘to a mere physiological necessity’ and which places it on a higher level than the ‘mere instinct of reproduction’. The author then affirms the possibility of a kind of ‘polyamory’ free from selfishness and exclusiveness, to replace conventional ‘faithfulness’ with ‘responsible freedom’. In other words, he disputes the idea that the capacity to give ‘one’s best’ in the erotic field requires having a relationship with a single person, to the exclusion of all others — a situation that in theory corresponds to the institution of monogamous marriage. The author, therefore, condemns the claim that a person can only belong to another alone (a reflection of the ‘obscurantism of the patriarchy’ — regrettably Nedelcovic, who offers some straightforward considerations, devoid of ideological encrustations, is evidently influenced here by the absurd ideas of the authors considered thus far); hence, he also condemns the complex of possessive sexual jealousy. According to Nedelcovic, it is wrong to say that there can be nothing sincere and profound, if an individual focuses his love on several persons rather than just one. It is a

grotesque bourgeois prejudice he adds — ‘to call a woman a slut if she has pre-marital or extra-marital relationships, and to call a man a poor “cuckold”, if his woman is ‘unfaithful’ to him, whereby — in line with a more or less foolish interpretation of male pride — he will feel offended and jealous, beat, murder, and so on.’

These observations provide the starting point for the new sexual ethics endorsed by Nedelcovic (as well as De Marchi). But this is hardly a new suggestion in relation to man, as far as human history and institutions are concerned. Various civilisations practised polygamy, and even in Classical Antiquity concubinage was an unquestioned and legally recognised complement to marriage. In principle and existentially, all this implied the redirecting and multiplying of man’s erotic interest in woman, as well as the non-existence or limited extension of exclusive possessive jealousy on woman’s part. As a typical example one may consider the case of the wife of a Roman emperor who — it is said — would visit the slave market early in the day to choose one or two of the best slave girls for her husband, or the case of the Japanese women who would accompany their husbands and bid them farewell when they were leaving to spend the weekend with other women.

The defining feature of the sexual ethics championed by Nedelcovic, therefore, lies in the fact that it demands for women the kind of sexual freedom and non-exclusiveness that men had granted themselves in the institutions and societies just mentioned, and which they in any case practically grant themselves — *de facto*, if not formally — in present-day monogamous bourgeois society. Nedelcovic informs us that he has not confined himself to theory, but has led his wife to give herself over to other men, men in a state of ‘conscious freedom’; and he reports that the outcome has not been the wrecking of their marriage, but an enrichment and intensification of their relationship.

In relation to all this, the following observations must be made. If this ‘ethics’ is widely applied, it becomes unclear what meaning or *raison d’être* marriage might still have. At most, it would be reduced to a ‘preferential clause’, a *ius eminens*, of one of the two spouses in favour of the other in their mutual relations, the two spouses being free to enjoy other sexual relationships. But even if this were the case, the problem remains that marriage, even when it does not have any sacramental and exclusive character, is generally connected with the idea of offspring. Hence, it would be necessary to establish a system of unions that rules out procreation (something which is only conceivable in relation to a small minority).

Alternatively, one would have to envision a society in which the family no longer exists, in which free love rules and the State takes care of all offspring, as theorised by some early forms of utopian Socialism and Communism, which were soon abandoned. Be that as it may, it is clearly absurd to wish to apply the ‘new ethics’ to both sexes equally, unless we wish to end up with a degree of promiscuity which I believe even the most open-minded people would find it difficult to accept. Indeed, if in various countries the law is much harsher when it comes to female adultery, despite the democratic equality between the sexes, this is essentially due to the objective fact that, unlike in the case of male adultery, female adultery entails the possibility of

the introduction of bastard offspring into the family via the wife's extra-marital relations.

The most important point, however, has to do with the title of the present chapter. One can acknowledge the ethical value of a system of sexual freedom without any exclusiveness only if this sexual freedom essentially presents itself as a freedom from sex, or is at least conducive towards such freedom. It is obvious that if we are truly capable of directing our erotic potential towards several persons to the same degree, without any jealousy and possessive exclusiveness, we have overcome the passivity that usually accompanies love, sex and passion, which is to say that we have freed ourselves from sex, without relinquishing it. Sexuality becomes something that is actively enjoyed, which is possessed and freely used, as opposed to something that we are possessed by and have to endure (along with bondage to women in general and to a particular woman). If this is the case, if this redirecting of sexual love in no way compromises the fullness and intensity of sexual experiences, it is evident that a higher level has been attained.

In this perspective, what I have already repeatedly noted, namely the absurdity of establishing the ethics of sexual freedom for everyone, becomes even clearer. It is clear that we cannot expect from ordinary men and women the kind of detachment that makes it possible to overcome all possessive exclusiveness, all bonds to a certain being, all jealousy. Most people cannot even conceive something of the sort. This only applies to exceptional cases, people with a particular constitution, or people who have taken upon themselves a special and rather difficult inner discipline.

Further particular restrictions apply to the female sex. Nedelcovic behaves like a gentleman when — in a spirit of fair play, so to speak — he demands for women the same kind of sexual freedom that men tacitly and egoistically grant themselves. Unfortunately, what stands in the way here are certain difficulties due not to the traditional privileges to which the male sex has laid claim, but rather to constitutive elements. The nature of women is such that typically they will find a serious erotic and sexual experience much more absorbing than men. Hence, we may conclude that it is far rarer for women to exhibit the superior inner level — or possibility to attain it — that allows freedom of sex to correspond to freedom from sex. Partly the situation may be less unfavourable among certain races, for example the central and northern European ones, where a stronger personality and greater inner freedom is more easily to be found among young women. In principle, however, the existential difference between the two sexes still applies, and it is necessary to draw the right conclusions from it: it must be acknowledged that the application of the 'new sexual ethics' to women is likely to entail, not an overcoming, not a higher freedom, but a decomposition, dissoluteness in the literal sense of the term — dissolution.

The inevitable counterpart to all this is a drop in level and trivialising of sexuality itself — as I have already noted in relation to recent developments in sexual mores in Italy.

We may conclude, therefore, that the whole sexual reform movement, which calls for a 'sexual revolution', is compromised right from the start by the fallacies of egalitarianism and democracy. Its representatives have no sense of the level at which it is reasonable to affirm certain demands

and values superior to those of petty, hypocritical and conformist bourgeois morality and all forms of ‘sexophobia’. Many unmistakable clues show that the champions of the current in question have an utterly promiscuous, naturalistic and disintegrated type of sexuality as their starting point. All legitimate and partial demands aside, given that this call for sexual freedom goes hand in hand with an attack against the ideals of a hierarchical, virile and aristocratic civilisation, as well as against the general values not of a ‘lesser morality’ but of ‘greater morality’, we can certainly regard this movement as part of the general process of regression at work in the present age.

The Race of the Fleeing Man

From ancient times it was recognised that there existed an analogy between the human being and the greater organism that is the State. The traditional conception of the State – an articulate and organic concept – has always reflected the natural hierarchy of the faculties proper to the human being, in the full sense of the term, in which the purely physical and somatic part is dominated by the vital forces, which obey the life of the soul and the character, whereas we find at the summit of all beings the spiritual and intellectual principle, which the Stoics called the ‘inner sovereign’, the *egemonikon*.

According to these ideas, it is clear that any form of democracy presents itself as a regressive phenomenon, as a system in which all normal relations are inverted. The *egemonikon* is non-existent. Determination comes from below. There is a lack of any genuine centre. A revocable, pseudo-authority, in the service of all that is base – to wit, the purely material, “social”, economic and quantitative aspect of a people – corresponds, according to the aforementioned analogy, to the following situation in the case of an individual being: a spirit and a spiritual principle which would have no other *raison d'être* than to represent the needs of the body, in sum, to be in its service.

The coming of democracy is something much deeper and much more serious than it seems today solely from the political point of view, that is to say, the error and the infinitely stupid pretension of a society digging its own grave. In effect, we can affirm that the “democratic” atmosphere is such that it can but exert, in the long term, a regressive influence on man considered as personality, even in “existential” terms: precisely because there are, as we have recalled, correspondences between the individual as a little organism and the State as a great organism.

This idea will find itself confirmed by the study of the different aspects of natural society. We know that Plato said that it was good that individuals without an inner master should at least find one outside themselves. But, to everything which has been vaunted as the “liberation” of such and such a people, in reality, brought into line, sometimes even with recourse to violence (such as after WWII), to benefit from a “democratic progress” which has eliminated all principle of sovereignty, of genuine authority and order from above, corresponds today, in a great many

individuals, to a “liberation” which is the elimination of any inner form, of all character, of all integrity, in a word, the decline or absence, in the individual, of that central power which the Ancients termed *egemonikon*. And this, not only on the ethical plane, but also in the domain of everyday behaviour, on the plane of individual psychology and of existential structure. The result is an ever-growing number of unstable, formless individuals, an invasion of what we may call the race of the fleeing man. This is a race which deserves to be defined more closely than we can do here, without hesitating to use scientific and experimental methods.

The kind of man we are talking about is not only recalcitrant to all inner discipline, is not only horrified at the idea of facing himself, he is equally incapable of any serious undertaking, incapable of following any precise orientation, and of proving his mettle. We can say that, in part, he does not want to, and in part, he is not able to. In effect, it is interesting to note that this instability is not always in the service of a personal and unscrupulous interest, and is not always the instability of he who says : “We do not live in an age where we can afford to have character.” No. In a number of cases, this type of behaviour acts to the detriment of those in question. Furthermore, it is significant that this weakened human type also appears in countries whose race and tradition are least favourable towards it (we are thinking especially of Central Europe and the Nordic countries, and to a certain extent, England), as well as in such classes as the aristocracy and the artisans, whose representatives kept, until recent times, a certain inner form.

The decline of all “professional honour” – an honour which had been, on a practical level, a precious manifestation of moral consciousness and even of a certain nobility – is in effect due to the same process of disintegration. The joy of producing, according to one’s art, by giving the best of oneself, with enthusiasm and honesty, gives way to the most immediate gain, which does not hesitate to stoop to bad workmanship or fraud. To give one characteristic example, from among many others: alimentary fraud, more widespread and cynical than ever, which has less to do with criminal irresponsibility than with shady dealings, the fall of inner level, the lack of all sense of honour, this sense of honour which, in other times, was possessed by the humblest of guilds. (In another domain, we see, in parallel to industrialisation, the proletarianisation and social blackmail of the “working class”, of those who are but mere “sellers of labour.”)

We have said that this phenomenon does not concern the moral domain solely. This instability, evasiveness, smug irresponsibility and casual impropriety, is manifested even in everyday banalities. One promises to do one thing – to write, to telephone, or take care of something or other – and does not do it. One is not punctual. In some more serious cases, even the memory is not spared: one forgets, one is distracted, one has difficulty concentrating. Some specialists have noticed a weakening of memory among the younger generations : a phenomenon which has been explained by all manner of bizarre and secondary reasons, but whose real cause is the modification of the general atmosphere, which seems to provoke a veritable alteration of the psychic structure. If we recall what Weininger aptly wrote on the relationship which exists between ethics, logic and memory, on the higher meaning of memory, not purely psychological, (memory being closely linked with the unity of the personality, by the resistance it provides

against dispersion in time, in the flux of duration; it has thus an ethical and ontological value, and it is not for nothing that a particular reinforcement of the memory is part of the disciplines of high asceticism, such as in Buddhism, for instance), we shall seize the deepest implications of this phenomenon.

Moreover, falsehood, gratuitous lies, without any real goal, are naturally part of the style of the fleeing man; we are here in the presence of one of his specifically “feminine” traits. And if we point out to a representative of this race of the fleeing man such behaviour, this individual is surprised, since such behaviour is natural to him, or else he feels slighted and reacts in an almost hysterical fashion. For he does not want to be “disturbed.” Everyone will notice, in his circle of acquaintances, this sort of neurosis, if he wishes to pay attention. And we can also notice how certain people we were under the illusion to consider as friends have become today, after the war, utterly unrecognisable. As to the world of politicians, with its schemes and the corruption which has always characterised parliamentary democracy, but which is especially obvious today, it is not even worth mentioning, so much has the race of the fleeing man, identical beyond all labels and parties, found his place. It should be noted, in effect, that, very often, those who profess ideas of the “Right” are no exception, because, with them, these ideas occupy a separate place, without any direct relationship and without any compelling consequence on their existential reality. It is more worthwhile to note a certain widespread corruption, in the sexual domain notably, spreading throughout the “emancipated” youth, and which is more or less in relation to “la dolce vita.” It corresponds in no way to anything positively anti-conformist; it is not the affirmation of a higher freedom, of a more pronounced personality. It is the effect of a mere “laissez-aller”, of passivity, the banal drop in level – so many things to which we shall have occasion to return, when we shall examine the backdrop of certain ideological currents presently advocating “sexual freedom”. The throne where the “inner sovereign” ought to sit, eventually to oppose the pure law of its being to any external law, to any hypocrisy and to any lie (Stirner, Nietzsche, Ibsen) – that place is empty. One lives from day to day, in a stupid manner, in sum. Whence, in those rare moments of awareness, disgust and ennui.

The absence of authority, of real leaders, on the outside, in the domain of the State – and absence of any inner form in the individual: these two things are in solidarity – one corroborates the other, to the point where we may think that they are perhaps two different aspects of one and the same phenomenon of these evolved and democratic times.

Romaness, Germanicness, and the “Light of the North”

The ideas I will be presenting here may be mostly of retrospective, historical interest, insofar as the situation that could have given them a concrete and topical value no longer applies at present. I actually first formulated and defended these ideas in the period during which movements of renewal and reconstruction had affirmed themselves in Italy and Germany, movements that sided against the most advanced forms of modern socio-political subversion — Communism and

democracy — and that were characterised by an impulse to return to the origins. In addition to purely political issues, they also addressed the need for a world-view that might serve as a foundation for an action designed to shape and rectify the human type of the two nations. The problematic and even negative aspects displayed by the two movements — the only aspects tendentiously emphasised in the present political climate — should not prevent objective spirits from acknowledging what can only be regarded as their valid potential, had they been adequately developed in the right circumstances. In the situation in question a specific problem also emerged — namely, the extent to which, in the reconstructive effort of these two movements, certain values and traditions of one people could integrate those of the other.

Today the preconditions for this problem are lacking. There is no need to state what the general socio-political and spiritual climate in Italy is like at the moment in which I am writing these lines; anyone can realise the wretched state in which this country finds itself through its infatuation with democracy and the growing gangrene of Socialism and Communism, notwithstanding the presence of certain dissident forces, which are however incapable of firmly uniting into a genuine front of the Right and defending a well-defined, profound and uncompromising doctrine of the State.

Phenomena of the sort I have referred to when speaking of the breed of the elusive man, of the taste for vulgarity, of decayed and regressive sexology and the third sex, and so on, are particularly noticeable in the Italy of today.

In Germany — in West Germany — the situation is even worse: while subversion, corruption and socio-political anarchy are not as advanced, and while there is more order and discipline, the whole past has been indiscriminately and almost hysterically thrown overboard, practical materialism is rampant, and the new generations utterly refuse to take interest in any superior idea. In many cases merely talking of a Weltanschauung is considered suspect and one struggles to find something that resembles those groups which in Italy have not fully forgotten things, and which in a way continue to resist and react.

Nevertheless, I believe that it might be of some interest to recall the problems that I addressed when the aforementioned situation applied — the problem of the relations between Romanness and Germanicness, and of the possibility of a mutual interaction of the two — on account of certain intrinsically valid and normative elements, as well as from a retrospective and documentary standpoint.

As regards Italy, the main starting point was the need to gradually give shape, out of the essence of the people of this country, to a superior type that to some extent would embody the resurfacing, after centuries, of a fundamental component: the Roman or, more accurately, 'Aryan-Roman' one, as a means to overcome other less favourable components that are present and even predominant at times.

The term 'Aryan' here is a reference to the Indo-European origins. It should not be compromised by the arbitrary and superficial uses made of it by a certain form of political racism; it contains a

fundamental and positive point of reference. Well known comparative research has highlighted some common elements that, in terms of character and ‘style’, distinguished dominant stocks that shared the same origin, such as those of ancient Rome, Doric-Achaean Greece, and the Germanic populations in Europe. Now, there are some aspects of the German character in which the original dispositions have better been preserved.

It is revealing that Prussia came to be referred to as ‘the Rome of the North’, while — as I have recalled in a previous chapter — some people have spoken of the Romans as the ‘Prussians of their age’.

Equally revealing is the nostalgia for the Dorian and Classical world harboured by Prussianism, as illustrated by the Dorianism of the famous Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

The inclination towards discipline, disinterested service (the expression *travailler pour le roi de Prusse* having become proverbial for every action not performed for personal gain), incorruptibility, sobriety, virility, active realism, reservedness, simple living, and clear and personal relationships based on command and obedience — all this has manifested itself in the best type of German and Prussian man to a far greater extent than in the Italian man, who is the physical heir to ancient Rome. Hence, when Italians, with their fixation for ‘Latinness’ and a certain ‘Mediterraneanness’, display an intolerance for all things German, it may well be argued that what are at work within them are dispositions and vocations that also oppose and distance Italians of this sort from the superior and original element in the history of the peninsula, namely the Aryan Roman element. It was evident, therefore, that given a true aspiration to rectify and elevate the Italian type, to ‘correct’ it, any contact between the Italian people and the German one would lead not to any distortion or deformation of the former but, on the contrary, would help it to restore and bring into action its obscured heritage — in terms of character, inner and external formation, style, and ethics.

For my part, however, I paid just as much attention to the opposite problem, namely the problem of what aspects of our tradition, in a process of rapprochement, might, in turn, rectify and integrate the Germanic elements. But here it was necessary to take a different domain into account.

While the field of character, ethics and life training essentially came into play in relation to the Germanic contribution, it was now necessary chiefly to refer to the higher level of the general view of life and even the idea of State. In this connection, it is also necessary to refer to the common origins of the two peoples. The Aryan-Roman element — which is to say the specifically Roman formulation of the common Indo-European heritage — presented itself as the essence of that which could promote a clarification, a rectification and a further development of the German spirit. As far as the essential task is concerned, with reference to the aforementioned situation, it may be expressed through the following formula: to rediscover the Olympian element of the North and promote the values and ideals deriving from them.

However, the preliminary condition, in this regard, was to clear various misunderstandings and

distortions that, in Germany and Italy alike, informed the ideas of those who argued that while the two countries might have common contingent political interests, ultimately there is an unbridgeable gulf standing between Romanness and Nordic Germanicness.

These ideas clearly derive from an arbitrary and one-sided conception, often a falsifying conception, of the Nordic-Germanic spirit, which finds its counterpart in a no less one-sided and contrived interpretation of Romanness. The animosity displayed by Catholic sectarianism also plays an important role here. Thus a well-established scholar of Germany, Guido Manacorda, drawing upon certain polemical motifs also shared by French Catholic nationalists, such as Henri Massis, believed that the opposition between Germanicness and Romanness can be summed up in the formula 'Forest and Temple'.

'Forest', which is to say nature above the spirit; a search for truth in the sub-rational levels of being, freedom as elementary audacity, a tragic and romantic view of the world, the religion of eternal becoming, pantheism, immanence, natural revelation, individualism, the affirmation of blood, folk and race against the State and any positive order, and so on — such would be the essence of Germanicness. 'Temple': the spirit above nature, the search for truth within the limits of human reason under the guidance of divine revelation, linearity, form, a Classical sense of measure, theistic transcendence, hierarchy, and so on — such would be the essence of Romanness.

Now, all this reflects a bias, a basic incapacity for objective discrimination. As regards facts in the field of concrete existential orientations and natural dispositions, the logical implications of an antithesis of this sort, assuming it is correct, are already contradicted by the elements that I have just highlighted in relation to Germanicness and Prussianism, elements I deem likely to exercise an integrative action upon the Italian spirit and character. Catholics stress the 'individualism' of Protestantism.

But while this may be correct on a theological level, with reference to Luther's idea of 'free examination', on the practical level it is not correct at all, because despite the Reformation the central and northern European peoples have preserved their innate disposition towards discipline, order and the respecting of authority.

Rather, as is well-known, it is precisely the Latin Catholic peoples that are distinguished by individualism, anarchy and a lack of discipline.

One wonders, moreover, to what extent Romanticism is an essential trait of the German spirit, along with what Spengler refers to as 'Faustianism', a concept he applies not just to the Germanic element, but to the whole cycle of 'Western' civilisation.

In my view, both orientations are to be regarded more as forms of decay than as primordial and original features of Germanicness. It is indisputable that Wagner and the infatuation with Wagnerianism played an important role in a certain kind of German culture, and even had political repercussions (for instance, through the prominence absurdly assigned to them within

the framework of National Socialism).

However, it is significant and decisive that whenever Wagner dealt with motifs drawn from the ancient Nordic-Germanic and medieval German traditions (including the legends of the Grail and Lohegrin, the ‘swan knight’) — invoking the right of the artist (or at any rate of the modern artist) to treat a given subject matter as he pleases — he has been guilty of corrupting distortions and manipulations which are bound to strike and astonish anyone who, possessing adequate traditional points of reference, has any actual knowledge of such things.

This does not change the fact that, looking back at the origins, which is to say the ancient Nordic-Germanic traditions, two circumstances make any clarification difficult, while explaining in part, if not justifying, misunderstandings of the sort just illustrated. The first circumstance is the fragmentary and often spurious state in which some general Indo-European conceptions (often even ones of Hyperborean origin) have been transmitted within the Nordic-Germanic traditions. The second circumstance refers to the repercussions that mythologised and transposed memories of primordial events have had upon these traditions.

For our purposes, it will be useful to briefly focus on the second point.

‘Tragic heroism’, that dark yet at the same time wild sense of life that some people regard as a congenital trait of the Nordic soul, constitutes an echo of something associated with the collapse of a very ancient civilisation. It is well known how much some followers of Wagner have gone on about the ‘twilight of the gods’. The corresponding Nordic term, *ragna-rökkr*, is rather to be translated — less romantically but more adequately — as the ‘obscuring of the divine’ (‘gods’ and ‘twilight’ being merely mythologised images).

The reference here is not to the specific view of the world of a given race or civilisation, but rather to episodes and events that fall within the historical and, partly, cosmic framework taken into account by ancient teachings pertaining to the four ages of the world, a concept also familiar to Classical Antiquity (Hesiod’s Bronze Age and iron age, for example, correspond to the age of the ‘Wolf’ in the Nordic tradition of the *Eddas*).

But one point needs to be emphasised: beyond these memories and the tragic and wild aspect of those events, the Nordic soul too has known a higher truth. Anyone with an adequate education will easily acknowledge that in the mythology of the *Eddas* itself the essential element does not correspond to the pathos of the emergence and unleashing of elementary forces and of the struggle against them, nor to the particularities of sagas that even betray the influence of popular superstitions and external elements; the essential, in the tradition in question, is to be found in what are ultimately ‘Olympian’ meanings. These are implied, for instance, by the idea of *Mitgard*, which reflects the general idea of a supreme centre and fundamental order of the world, and which, in a way, may be considered the metaphysical basis of the idea of empire; by the symbolism of *Valhalla* as a mountain whose frozen and bright peak shines of an eternal light

beyond all clouds; and, connected to this, the motif of the so-called Light of the North in its many variants. In relation to this, I should recall the symbolism of the golden realm of Gladsheim, ‘brighter than the sun’; secondly, the royal castle of Oegier, which houses the Asen and in which gold — the traditional symbol for all that is incorruptible, royal and solar — manifests the power of a burning light; and, finally, the image of the celestial place of Gimle, ‘more magnificent than any other and brighter than the sun’, which ‘will endure even when the heavens and earth pass away’.

In this and many other motifs, however fragmentarily recorded, a trained eye is bound to detect a testimony to a higher dimension in ancient Nordic mythology. We must conclude therefore that, like the men of Classical Antiquity, Nordic Germanic men were familiar with the idea of an order existing beyond the world of becoming and of a tragic and elementary reality.

According to the *Völuspá* and *Gylfagynning*, after ragna-rökkr a ‘new sun’ and ‘new race’ will arise; the ‘divine heroes’, or Asen, will return to Idafeld and find gold, which symbolises the primordial tradition of luminous Asgard and the original state. Beyond the mist of the ‘Forest’, then, a higher light shines.

There is something greater than becoming and perishing, tragedy and fire, frost and death. Let us recall Nietzsche’s words: ‘Beyond ice, the north, death — our life, our joy.’

This, truly, is the final profession of faith of the Nordic man, a profession of faith which, ultimately, may be regarded as Olympian and Classical.

Once we have clarified this point, we must acknowledge all the dross that the original tradition of the Light of the North has accumulated, partly as a consequences of the times, partly through poetic and romantic speculations. We will then be able to speak of a ‘rediscovery of the Nordic Olympian world’, which requires us to broaden our horizons and adopt higher points of reference. Indeed, even Günther has acknowledged that in order to learn about the true essence of the Nordic peoples we cannot refer to the beliefs of the Germanic peoples alone, for which — according to this scholar — ‘we unfortunately have insufficient documents and from a period in which they had already more or less been influenced by religious conceptions from Asia Minor, the Mediterranean and Western Europe — the very Western Europe which through druidism had already become significantly removed from Indo-European religiosity of the purely Nordic sort.’

It is by looking at the purer and more primordial forms that the same spirit acquired among other peoples of the same stock that — according to Günther — we can find better elements to understand the true essence of the Germanic traditions. In this respect, the author refers not just to the ancient civilisations of India, Persia and Greece, but also to the ancient Italic traditions.

On the basis of these conclusions, I argued that certain elements associated with Romanness might be helpful to a Germanic elite, insofar as it would allow it to regain awareness of the

‘Olympian’ component of the Nordic tradition, as a common basis for an action of restoration and rectification directed at the two civilisations and cultures. In certain German milieus this assessment of the Roman element often met with a strong resistance in the past — and may still meet some resistance today (should it even be possible to bring up such problems in the civilisation of the ‘economic miracle’ of present-day West Germany). It cannot be denied that German culture has displayed a certain anti-Roman animosity, and not just in the essentially political terms of the so-called *Kulturkampf* waged by Bismarck to reaffirm the authority of the State against any interferences from the Church of Rome and as a residual echo of Lutheran polemics — an animosity that has offered a pretext to those who, in Italy, are obsessed by the notion of a fundamental antithesis between Romanness and Germanicness.

To clear all misunderstandings, however, it is necessary to draw a distinction by explaining what kind of Romanness I am referring to. All too often people in Italy have turned Rome into an abstract idea, a Humanist echo, a rhetorical object. All too often the primordial essence of Rome has been overlooked — the essence of that Rome whose origins lie in an august myth, that Rome which will always have an evocative power, that Rome which coincides not with a merely historical concept or ancient juridical structure, but rather with an order shaped by something more than simply human values — by divine powers, figures and dominions: a world of metaphysical tensions, a solar world marked by elitism, an Olympian and heroic reality, order, light, pure virility, and pure action. Closely related to all this is the idea of the State, of Imperium. Such is the Romanness which represents a value for me, and it should not be regarded as the miracle of an isolated creation, sprung out of nothing, but rather as a peak in the overall cycle of the Indo-European peoples and civilisations: not a beginning but rather a rebirth, the mysterious re-emergence of a primordial heritage that, after growing dim through the contingencies and ethnic chaos of the archaic Mediterranean world, manifested itself once again, attaining a peak that Greece was never able to reach on account of the lack of a firm political idea — the deeds of Alexander the Great only possessing the fleeting brilliance of a meteor. Thus, the greatness of Rome is marked by what are also Nordic and Hyperborean symbols, such as the axe, wolf and eagle; the ancient *ius sacrum* and *ius civile* of the Romans present some unmistakable affinities with the juridical forms of all ancient Indo-European civilisations; and the *flamen dialis*, a particularly significant figure belonging to the more ancient forms of Roman priesthood, stood as a ‘living statue of the deity’ and was closely related to the Roman idea of the State, while presenting the same traits as the members of the highest sacred caste in the ancient Indo-Aryan civilisation. Despite various unfavourable circumstances and setbacks, this tradition endured for centuries and shines even in the late imperial period through many figures, myths and episodes.

Thus — as I have already recalled — alongside the Caesar who displays the traits of a dictator, we find the Caesar who, according to Suetonius, could claim as a young man that his lineage combined the majesty of kings and sacredness of the gods, in whose power also those who rule men lie.

This Caesar was venerated not as an individual, but as ‘perpetual victor’, which is to say as a supra-personal power governing the destiny of the Romans. The ancient world saw Augustus as an equally momentous figure; significantly, a relation was established between his person, the Delphic cult of light, the Apollonian idea of Hyperborean origins, and the symbolic figure of Orestes as the establisher of a new virile and celestial law, against the chthonic Pelasgian and pre-Indo-European world of the Mothers and of elemental forces.

Moreover, a confused yet powerful instinct led the Romans to detect a return in this stage of their history: the return of the primordial golden age, which is merely the mythologised memory of the original cycle of the stock from which the various ancient Indo-European races have sprung.

People have spoken of the *aeternitas Romae*, which is more than mere rhetoric; one must think, here, of that which, being primordial, has eternal youth and is virtually superior in itself to the temporal condition, to ‘history’. This has specific implications for historical and political reality.

As already noted, the distinguishing feature of Rome compared to Greece lies in its close relation to the idea of empire and the principle of a universal order, something which allows us to draw a parallel with the impulse behind the ancient Aryan-Iranian civilisation, against the metaphysical background provided by Mazdaism.

The symbol of Rome is essentially that of an order which derives its highest legitimation precisely from Olympian aspects, and which therefore participates in the Aryan-Olympian light, yet also in something fateful and supra-temporal. At the same time, it represents an apex of human power and embodies an ideal of earthly justice and ‘triumphal peace’.

When considering the political ideal of Rome, one must not lend too much weight to detached juridical forms, particularly the decayed and universalistic (in a negative sense) ones of the late Roman age, which later came to be fetishised. It is precisely these forms that fuelled a certain anti-Roman polemic in Germany, which criticised a legal system ‘made up of clauses’ (something unknown in early Roman law). On the political level, what is notable in Rome is rather the lofty character of the principle and ideal of State vis-à-vis the naturalistic order, which encompasses what pertains merely to the *ethnos*, folk, nation and race. Here there is no need to repeat what I have argued in a previous chapter with regard to ‘form’ and ‘matter’, the male and female principles which are at work in socio-political forms of organisation, and which differentiates these forms depending on which of the two is predominant.

In the situation in the period under consideration, this was a particularly momentous point: the Roman ideal presented itself as a means to rectify one of the most problematic aspects of the German movement, insofar as it tended to emphasise the *Volk* and the *Völkische* — ambiguous terms, since *Volk* can mean both ‘people’ (the masses) and ‘nation’ or ‘race’. A genuine mythology of the race/people took shape which, while keeping to an essentially naturalistic conception of the race/people, turned it into the primary element, the ultimate point of reference,

which was expected to condition all political, ethical and cultural spheres. This myth was further extended in the sense that the ideal of the Reich itself was founded on it; the notion was developed of a guiding, ruling and ordering function exercised by a given nation/race which was not enhanced by a principle from above, not marked by any true grace. Thus populist and collectivist aspects came to be associated with what Vico refers to as the ‘arrogance of the nations’, a nationalist infatuation awkwardly modelled after Hegel’s doctrine of the ‘leading folk’.

In this respect, however, the contrast between the new Reich — the Third Reich — and the previous German political tradition is evident, given first of all that Prussia originally emerged as the secular form of a State created by an Order, that of the Teutonic Knights, and second that the informing principle of Prussianism was later precisely the State, with the Hohenzollern ensuring the unity of Prussia.

When Bismarck founded the German empire, the Second Reich, the old conservative faction denounced the purely ‘naturalistic’ and subversive character of the ideology of the ‘nation’.

Bismarck himself, who did not believe in this ideology or in the Volk at all, saw dynastic loyalty as the true, solid, spiritual and ethical foundation of the empire. However, even in the National Socialist period some of those who had championed the so-called ‘conservative revolution’ and coined the concept of ‘Third Reich’, while endorsing National Socialism, consciously maintained these higher points of reference.

One might mention, for example, Christoph Steding, who noted that ‘only the State and the empire can lead a folk out of the condition of a dreamy being in-itself and lend objective existence to the community of blood and race.’ I have already quoted Steding’s saying that ‘men’ uphold the State and empire, whereas ‘matriarchal’ spirits uphold the ‘people’, the Volk — this being a deep difference, a matter of essence.

‘In order for a nation or race to reach that higher level which corresponds to the idea of State and empire, it must be struck and transformed by “Apollo’s lightning bolt”’ — and there are no exceptions to this. ‘Even Nordic-Aryan blood’, Steding stated, ‘needs this flash, this transformation, a catharsis leading it from regions of dark, naturalistic promiscuity to the level of the spirit, where the global political life of the State unfolds.’ The ‘race of Rome’ may legitimately be counted among those which in the ancient world were permeated by ‘Apollo’s lightning’, to the point of embodying a principle that the previous Mediterranean world had sought to affirm in vain. Here we may refer back to the brilliant reconstruction of the secret history of the ancient Mediterranean world provided by Bachofen.

If the paternal-Apollinean ideal, with its ethical, social, juridical and political values, was able to triumph for some time over the ambiguous world of paleo-Mediterranean tellurism, Dionysianism and the spiritual matriarchy, this is due precisely to the work of Rome.

What we have, then, is something very different from barren juridical positivism and ‘State

worship'. The prominence accorded to the State and the law in Rome over the mere matter of the 'people' was based on a sacred principle.

It marks the presence and victory of a race that had the virile and paternal element as its centre and which affirmed the luminous principle (connected to the figure of Iupiter Optimus Maximus) — closely related to the Nordic idea of Mitgard and to the symbolic 'Light of the North'. This occurred not on the level of a spirituality such as the Hellenic one, in which myth was almost exclusively envisaged in relation to an overworldly realm and became subject to aestheticising forms of decay, but rather on the level of a global historical reality such as that of empire.

By adopting a point of view of this sort, one may view in a new light the encounters that occurred in history between the Roman tradition and the Nordic-Germanic one — in the Middle Ages, for instance. In relation to the Middle Ages as a whole, the situation may be described in the following terms: the strictly Germanic element helped reawaken in various parts of Italy the dispositions of a kindred heritage which had been present ever since the dawn of the Latin world; in turn, certain aspects of the Roman tradition helped revive a spiritual heritage that had often become obscured in the Nordic-Germanic peoples of the invasion period, a heritage that was equally kindred to the Roman one. This explains the appeal that Romanness, even in its twilight forms, exercised on the early Germanic peoples. In these early centuries, those races that burst onto the stage of history as new and still uncorrupted forces could certainly have swept away, not only whatever political power still endured, but Rome itself as a spiritual symbol, had they, as though following an obscure yet unfailing instinct, not perceived and found traces of a kindred spirit within it. This also holds true on the level of the ideal of the State, in relation to which the aforementioned author, Steding, writes: 'Since up until then in our Western world the Roman State had been the one which best embodied the idea of statehood and, as an almost ideal model, had realised the pure idea of the State according to the Nordic spirit, it is hardly surprising that it came to be acknowledged as a model also by many men who tended to keep to themselves, such as the Germans in the Middle Ages ... A glance at our predecessors' faces — through surviving images or statues — is enough to show that the so-called Roman "denaturalisation" was not at all harmful to them, since they appear far more virile, conscious, firm and healthy than those contemporaries of ours who wish to deny a fair share of our German past.' Here, Walter Franck noted, the heritage of Widukind, the leader of the Saxons, 'met that imperial tradition shaped after the image of Rome which with Charlemagne, in an iron-and-blood event, as is in any great upheaval in world history, united for the first time the disjointed and scattered world of the Germanic peoples.' However, we should not overlook the spiritual counterpart to this process.

While we may well speak of a denaturalisation, as far as the 'conversion' and Christianisation of the Germanic peoples are concerned, it is also true that a remote Nordic-Aryan heritage was awoken by the encounter with Rome, ultimately leading to that grand Romano-Germanic civilisation expressed and animated by a metaphysical tension: the Ghibelline Middle Ages.

According to this perspective, a Germanic as much as Roman tradition could provide some points of reference for mutual encounters, for the differentiation of vocations, and for the

rectification of the ideological deviations marring yesterday's German movement. One such deviation is the attempt to call the idea of the First Reich, which is to say the Holy Roman Empire, into question on account of its transcendence and universality, which naturally conflict with the ideology of the Volk. What has just been argued helps clear this misunderstanding and distorted interpretation, while revealing the medieval imperial phenomenon as one of those cases in which the Volk, the nation/race, rather than being rejected is assigned a higher dimension, one constituting the precondition for any higher mission— a dimension that is symbolised by 'Apollo's lightning' and which is also attested by the sacred features displayed by the sovereigns of that age. Of course, in relation to modern times, this reappraisal was intended to prove influential at a deep level, by challenging the myth of the people/race as the primary and decisive element of a given political organisation and by leading a political structure headed by an almost populist figure who derived his charismatic power and authority from the Volk — in contrast to the legitimacy that distinguishes all traditional forms of sovereignty — to acknowledge its own involution.

In certain extremist milieus, moreover, one could observe the misunderstanding represented by certain neo-pagan aspirations. Certainly, the need expressed by the formula 'the struggle over world-view' (*Kampf um die Weltanschauung*) was legitimate. In order for a movement to have a truly creative character, leaving mere political ideologies aside, it must have a distinctive view of the world and of life. No less legitimate was the need to reassess the validity of certain generally acknowledged conceptions related to the beliefs which have become predominant in the West — which is to say, related to Christianity. In this sphere, the Italian counterpart to this movement had shown a lack of courage: while evoking the symbols of Romanness, it had consciously avoided addressing the question of the extent to which the adoption of these symbols as the foundation of a new world view was compatible with Christian conceptions. Hence, it had limited itself to a conformist reverence for them and to compromises. By contrast, the German milieus in question had given proof of such courage.

Regrettably, however, the 'paganism' they professed was something artificial and spurious, with almost no reference to the actual content of the traditions of the higher, pre-Christian or non-Christian Indo-European civilisations. In the 'struggle over world-view', no plans were made for a genuine return to the origins. The distortion of many themes and the heavy politicisation of others were evident, for example, in Alfred Rosenberg's famous work *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, which was almost regarded as a touchstone.

The regressive tendency of this work was all to evident insofar as it sympathised with those proclaiming a so-called 'natural doctrine of the spirit', associating this with the mystique of life and blood, with those professing the sort of irrationalism I have criticised in a previous chapter, and with those who deemed any doctrine of transcendence or higher asceticism 'non-Aryan', and so on. This neo-paganism was marked by a perfectly naturalistic view of existence, akin to that which had distinguished civilisation forms anterior to the appearance of the world of the Indo-European Olympian gods.

Thus it is hardly surprising that in the ranks of those who professed themselves to be ‘pagans’ and who championed a new national German religion, people were to be found who also invoked a return to the matriarchy (Bergmann); nor is it surprising that Klages chose to refer to the view of life of the Pelasgians, i.e. the paleo-Mediterranean people to which Dorian and Apollonian Greece was opposed, and which in Italy came to be associated with the plebeian component of the Roman State.

Yet even the emphasis assigned to woman’s role as mother in certain organisations of the German regime — the very organisations that simultaneously upheld the markedly virile ideal of the *Ordenstaat*, which is to say of a State governed by an Order, as opposed to a class of petty democratic politicians, party men or demagogues — was questionable, to say the least. Now, with regard to the German ‘neo-pagan’ tendency, insofar as it gave proof of these distortions, misunderstandings and primitivism, the important thing was to show that it was possible to react to it on the basis not of Christianity nor of fanciful notions such as that of ‘Forest and Temple’, but of the actual Indo-European, or Aryan, origins. Within the perspective and limits just outlined, Romanness itself presented several valid points of reference that could provide a lift, rectification, and re-establishment of the required discipline of the spirit within the domain of the ‘struggle over the world-view’ and the — in principle legitimate — revisionism this entailed.

I will mention one more point. Throughout history, North and South have been the object of a mutual nostalgia that has rarely reached any balance. In this respect, one might note a curious circumstance. Whereas the nostalgia for the South has a prevalently ‘physical’ and sentimental character, the nostalgia for the North has a chiefly metaphysical and spiritual character. To this day the central or northern European man feels a nostalgia for the South, either as a humanist or as someone seeking sunlight, physical rest, and a certain picturesque environment that strikes him as exotic. The nature of the nostalgia for the North that at times manifested itself among the ancient Mediterranean peoples of the Classical age was of a different sort. In their view, the North was where the holy land of the Hyperboreans and Thule were located, conceived as the solar isle — *Tule a sole nomen habens*.

They believed that in the North Chronos still lived in a slumbering state: the god symbolising the golden age, which is to say the primordial times — which is why the Arctic Sea used to be known as the Sea of Chronos in antiquity. In the North the ‘midnight sun’ offered them a physical symbol of the highest mystery of Mediterranean antiquity, that of the inner light that rises where sensible light fades. Through the phenomenon of an almost nightless day, this land struck them as the closest one to the land of perennial light. We are even told that a Roman Emperor led his legions to the northernmost areas of Britain not so much to earn the laurel wreath of military victory as to experience while still alive the union with the divine that awaited Roman sovereigns in the afterlife and to behold the king of the gods — who, according to another tradition and myth, however, resides in Latium, in Roman territory.

All this would appear to further confirm that the memory of the Nordic Olympian world, many aspects of which became obscured in later Germanic traditions, was kept alive by the

Mediterranean races of the same stock. This primordial heritage — as we have seen — also encompasses the roots of those truly eternal aspects of Romanness. There was good reason to think, therefore, that to the extent that through this Romanness it was possible to help the Germanic man to acquire an anti-Romantic, clear, solemn, virile yet at the same time free and sovereign world-view, he would not become estranged from himself but would rather be brought back to the deepest and most original element in his own tradition. Aside from the fact that this would have served as a valid foundation for bringing out the positive elements of the German movement, paralysing the negative ones through an active retrieving of the symbol of a ‘conservative revolution’, the natural overcoming of one-sided and tendentious antitheses between the two cultures entailed by this would also set the ground for a true understanding between the elites of the two peoples. The nostalgia of the Nordic soul for the brightness of the Mediterranean can therefore overcome the level of aestheticism and naturalism, and acquire the deeper meaning of a spiritual impulse to grasp a metaphysical reality.

The Classicality of the action of ruling. Mistrust towards any yielding of one’s spirit. The will towards a heroic catharsis. The affirmation of all the values of realism, discipline and sheer power, of order against chaos, of what transcends life vis-à-vis mere life, of a clear and bright vision by opposition to all that is darkly psychic, instinctual and naturalistic, form, hierarchy, limits as the expression of an infinite that possesses itself, State, Empire, the ideal of ascetic, warrior organisations as new Orders — all such things lie beyond North and South, all such things are ‘Aryan’ and ‘Roman’: they constitute the hallmarks of every great constructive cycle, of all great races in their period of high tension.

But unfortunately, in the present state of prostration that Europe now finds itself in, what significance can the presentation of such ideas and the evoking of such symbols still have?

The Metaphysics of Sex and the “One”

Generally speaking, I believe that discussions are only meaningful and significant if they essentially aim to provide a clarification, on the basis of a shared assumption. If a writer is capable of recognising the ultimate assumptions of his own thought (whether they are related to his ‘personal equation’ or not), and grasps the fundamental difference between them and those of another writer, the only sensible thing for him to do is to follow his own path without seeking to interfere with an intellectual world that is foreign to him. However, this rarely happens, owing to the lack of the aforementioned preliminary self-analysis; writers do not even limit themselves to providing an immanent critique of other people’s views (which would certainly be something acceptable and worthwhile), but engage in confused polemics — precisely because of the divergence in underlying conceptions. This ultimately demonstrates the influence of sub rational motivations.

Given all this, I would never have taken into account a book such as Giulio Cogni’s *Io sono te — sesso e oblazione* (I Am You — Sex and Offering).

But the author thought it would be a good idea to include an essay in his book on my work, *Metafisica del sesso* (Eros and the Mysteries of Love). That is not as important as the fact that in these circumstances grave confusions and distortions have weighed on a domain that goes beyond the ideas that I have espoused on various occasions. Hence, it is opportune to provide a clarification that, all polemics aside, may shed light on a few clusters of potentially interesting ideas.

The views of *Io sono te* essentially reproduce those which Cogni had already expressed in another book, *Saggio sull'amore* (An Essay on Love), published in 1933. At that time, someone wisely said that Cogni, who was then a follower of Gentile through and through, had translated Gentile's theory of the 'spirit as pure act' into a more sapid 'theory of the spirit as impure act', since he saw sexual union as a prominent and concrete form of the identification of the subject with the object postulated by Gentile's actualism.

Moreover, Cogni formulated a 'phagic' or 'anthropophagic' theory: loving would mean eating oneself, devouring oneself. His new book expounds a similar thesis through the 'equations hunger-sex and hunger love'. Previously, Cogni had presented things in rather masochistic terms: man is 'eaten' by the woman in whom he is absorbed and loses his individuality. In his more recent exposition, this 'erotic anthropophagy' seems to be conceived as something reciprocal — a rather unlikely prospect since, ironically, it leads us to think that in the end all that remains of the lovers is two mouths, each lover having been entirely ingested and consumed by the other.

If his entire theory ended here, with 'phagia', we might say that Cogni was inspired only by the crudest aspects of sexuality: the 'hunger' of bodies, simple lustful desire. But he immediately moves on to things that are in complete contrast with what, by way of analogy, 'eating' and hunger might suggest. Cogni always gets back to 'dedication', to 'sacrificial offering', the self-abandonment that in his view occurs in eroticism and sexual union.

Carnal pleasure would be a 'complete renunciation of oneself in order to make oneself the other' (p. 16).

Cogni even switches to a sort of mysticism: 'the sexual act is a form of humility based on self-annihilation and the sacrificing of oneself to the universal life that is seen in the body of the beloved' (p. 111). 'Love is "phagic" because only through the gift of the body, through devouring and letting oneself be devoured, does one realise the most powerful symbol of Unity: any alleged individual separation is removed.' The ultimate goal is 'immersion into the cosmic One without a second' (*ibid.*). All this seems like a pure digression to me, even one with a slight paranoid tinge.

First of all, with regard to the incongruence of his points of view, it must be noted that in 'hunger' and in 'phagia', which are presented as the key to sex, there is no trace of this 'sacrificial' orientation, this self-abandonment and 'sweet' identification ('sweet' being a word that often recurs in Cogni, even in connection to sadomasochistic situations. One might say, not without malice, that he displays a marked preference — of the sort usually found among women — for confectionery products rather than the prevalently manly taste for spicy and peppered

food). Indeed, what is at work in hunger is the neediness of an individual suffering from deprivation, an individual that by eating only pursues his self-preservation and satiety: exactly the opposite of self-abandonment and of the sacrificial gift of oneself. Besides, there is nothing ‘sweet’ about an absolute, devouring hunger. And since Cogni even makes of anthropophagy in its proper sense a sort of mysticism, he does not realise that, in general, it reflects the same sort of situation: as has been widely demonstrated, if the savage feeds himself with the flesh of others, he does not do so for any ‘sweet’ identification, but only — and more gloomily — because he believes he is absorbing the other person’s powers to his own advantage. As for eating the flesh of sacrificial victims, it is fanciful to say that what is at work within it is the tendency to immerse oneself in the cosmic One. In general, here everything boils down to ‘totemic’ participation (the victim incarnating the totem), and hence to a rather restricted order, adumbrated by the sorcery and demonism typical of totemism in general. This is therefore a very flimsy and inconsistent basis for the theses advocated with reference to sex. And the Eucharistic symbol — unless one wishes to totally contaminate it by discovering in it rather suspect roots — boils down to a mere allegory.

As far as I am concerned, the fundamental intention of my book *Metafisica del sesso* was to highlight the existence of a possible transcendent dimension of sex. I endeavoured to lead the ‘transcendental’ meaning of eros (in the almost Kantian sense) back to a dark, unconscious impulse to restore an original wholeness. Hence, I referred to the Platonic theory of the androgyn, as the most noted mythical formulation of this idea in the West.

Moreover, I noted that what may come into play in the erotic sexual experience are phenomena of ‘transcendence’, of a momentary traumatic removal of the common conditionings of individual consciousness.

I showed that this was the precondition for the practices of certain milieus, especially Eastern ones, which make initiatic, magical or evocatory use of sex. But all that is quite far from Cogni’s mystical-phagic digressions, and every confusion in this regard is deplorable.

First of all, we should not generalise by attributing the marked quality of ‘transcendence’ to what is typical of almost all sexual unions among human beings. What holds true in the metaphysical or transcendental realm cannot be applied to the phenomenological. A phenomenological examination disproves all the idealising, mystical and fanciful notions of a ‘very sweet’ sacrifice, or the sacrificial surpassing of oneself in the flesh of the other to which Cogni always returns. Factually, in most sexual intercourse, one partner seeks only his or her own pleasure, making the other a means to this, so that the situation is not very dissimilar — *sit venia verbis* — from ‘mutual masturbation’. Therefore, there is no overcoming of individual bonds. In the second place, existentially, often — and today more than ever sex serves as a means of self-confirmation for the individual, to fulfil his need to ‘be worth something’ (Geltungstrieb, as Adler would say), or to look for an illusory, turbid substitute for a true sense of existence, which he lacks. Hence, once again, there is no exit from the closed circle of the individual. Finally, as I have already noted — and also emphasised in my book — although sporadic phenomena of

‘transcendence’ can sometimes occur in the profane experience of sex, usually they are not experienced as such. They are realised in traumatic, extreme forms of orgasm that for the most part represent a ‘break’ in the individual’s consciousness, to which he or she returns feeling empty, instead of having had ‘the dazzling experience of the One’. This experience rarely occurs in profane, carnal, or romantic love. It chiefly pertains to the magical and initiatic use of sex, the kind of use that — among other things — involves a special approach to sexual intercourse, and about which one thing is certain: intensive states of particular, destructive intoxication come into play (destructive, that is, in an almost ontological, not moral, sense). This excludes ‘phagia’, the abandonment of oneself to the other, self-sacrifice, and all the ‘sweet’ and pantheistic affectations so dear to Cogni. Besides, the dangerous — and far from idyllic, romantic and idealising — character of such practices has always been emphasised.

Cogni has also noticed the relation I have indicated — and which takes multiple forms — between eros and death, between sex deities and deities of destruction and death, but without understanding this relation in its true sense. Besides, it is significant that the secret Hindu orgiastic rites designed to lead to the aforementioned experience of transcendence were celebrated under the sign of goddesses like Durga and Kali, not in their maternal aspect but in the destructive one. Sekhmet, the Egyptian goddess of love, is also the goddess of destruction and war (her leonine head refers to a beast whose manners are not exactly the sweetest). Something analogous applies to the ancient goddesses of the Mediterranean area, starting with Ishtar, also the goddess of orgies.

Related to all this is the following point. I have indicated the magnetic foundation of every form of eros and every intense sexual experience.

It is the strengthening of such a foundation that serves as the basis for the aforementioned experiences. But this foundation is due precisely to the polarity of male and female as ontological principles, something that has always been acknowledged. Cogni denies that this polarity is an essential requirement of eros, which in his view only concerns the naturalistic plane, as in electricity and other similar phenomena. That means that for him all the documentation that I have brought together, in an entire chapter, from the most varied cultural areas, regarding the ‘metaphysical dyad’ might as well not exist because it contradicts his promiscuous pantheism.

Without dwelling on this domain, which is perhaps a little too specialistic, I will now provide a more general outline of the erotology proposed by Cogni. The theory of eros as pantheistic identification is nourished, in Cogni’s work, by references to India and to Hindu philosophy through the Vedanta.

Clearly, Cogni has only seen of India what, given his temperament, he could appreciate: an India immersed in the ‘dream of the One’, the ‘warm, all-embracing, all-justifying, supremely tolerant, loving and accepting sweetness of the people and land of India’.

The Mother India discovered by certain humanitarian American authoresses who have worn out

their femininity — the India associated with Gandhism, non-violence, and the alleged climate of ‘loving equality’ stemming from the feeling of a One above every illusory difference — would be the true India. But this image is partly one-sided, partly absurd.

First of all, Cogni seems to overlook the small flaw in this ‘sweet tolerance’, as represented by the massacres between the Hindu and Islamic inhabitants of India, including some that are recent, as well as the elimination of Gandhi — yet another delectable incident.

He then ignores the fact that, if there has ever been a social regime in the world that for millennia has rigidly enforced the principle of difference, it is the Hindu caste system. Standing in contrast to the alleged India that is all love, self abandonment and pardon is the India of the great epics and of the Bhagavad Gita, a traditional text which in India enjoys the same popularity as the Bible does among Westerners.

It attributes to the supreme manifestation of the divine an overwhelming character of destructive transcendence, drawing from this a spiritual and metaphysical justification for the warrior’s duty to fight and kill, sparing neither friends nor relatives should they be found in the enemy’s ranks.

And everyone knows that the Hindu Trimurti, which is much more familiar to the Hindu population than the abstractions of Vedantic speculation, attributes to Shiva the divine function of destruction.

But it is little use stressing such things, since Cogni is visibly affected by a spiritual blindness that prevents him from seeing whatever does not support his inclinations. Thus Buddhism only interests him in its late and popular exoteric forms as a religion, with its ‘love for all creatures’, Amida the god of love, etc., by contrast to the rigorous individual ascetic techniques of the Buddhist doctrine of ‘awakening’ illustrated in the genuine texts of the original Buddhist canon — which I have presented by strict reference to these texts in a book that Cogni claims to be familiar with.

From that canon it becomes obvious that, among other things, if love and compassion figure (still only with an instrumental function) as preliminary stages in the sequence of the four phases of the highest Buddhist contemplation, of dhyana, they are ultimately left behind, since the summit is constituted by a state of sovereign, disembodied impassibility and imperturbability that, whether Cogni likes it or not, has something of the ‘Olympian’ quality to it and nothing of a soft humanitarianism.

De facto, our author does not dwell on the peaks, but on the trash heaps of India. Current devotion has certainly played a role in India, but only among the lower, popular strata of society, which are not unrelated to the pre-Indo-European substrate of the country. Only relatively recently has it corresponded to a philosophical system, that of Ramanuja.

Earlier, it was considered a ‘path of devotion’ and love, bhakti-marga, but it certainly was not assigned any prominence: the dignity of a spiritual ‘royal path’, raja marga, was rather attributed to the path of knowledge’, jnana-marga and jnana-yoga.

This character has chiefly been attributed to the Vedanta, which Cogni is enthusiastic about, seeing it however only as the theory of absolute Identity, of non-duality, of the One-All, of 'thou art that', a theory providing the basis for his ideas about an eros that embraces and reunites everything.

Now, it should be said that the primitivistically pantheistic version of Vedanta does not at all exhaust the Hindu spiritual world. First of all, we may note that a radical monism is not attested in the original tradition, in the Vedas, which present us with an articulated pantheon. In the second place, India has known some great speculative systems, like Samkhya, which emphasises the primordial duality of purusha and prakrti, and like metaphysical Tantra, which criticises the 'illusionistic' Vedanta (the world is maya) and which along with the Kashmir School has formulated a highly differentiated cosmological doctrine.

I will not dwell on these factual data about India. The essential point is that Cogni exchanges the metaphysical One with the pantheistic One, with that One which — according to the expression Hegel uses with regard to the 'philosophy of identity' of the later Schelling — is 'the night in which all cows are black'.

This is not the One that dominates a well-articulated order of differences (a kosmos, in the Hellenic sense) but rather a promiscuous 'naturalistic' unity which is to be associated with 'Life'. Such is Cogni's spiritual horizon.

From this confusion, much more serious confusions arise in the practical realm. Cogni has no sense of the fact that just as there exists an integrative 'ascending self-transcendence', so a 'descending self-transcendence' exists that is dissolving and regressive for one's true personality. In other words, the I can experience openings either upwards or downwards — which is to say, towards 'nature', the unconscious, and the formless ground of life. Only the former openings correspond to high ascesis, initiation, and authentic yoga. Ancient wisdom drew a distinction and contrast between 'higher waters' and 'lower waters', where the former are illuminating, the latter intoxicating and dissolving; and this basic doctrine, which was also taken up by thinkers from the Renaissance period, has opportunely been recalled by one of the few people today who are truly qualified in this field, namely René Guénon, in order to warn us of the danger and deviations of a certain contemporary 'spiritualism'.

To return to the field of eros, Cogni mentions the ambivalence that is present, from the spiritual point of view, in sexual experiences. If woman was seen as a danger in the past, if the saying *foemina mors animae* ('woman is the death of the soul') was used in Latin as a way to recommend continence, this is not attributable to any moralistic attitude, to the 'theological hatred for sex' that Vilfredo Pareto speaks of, or to the 'sexophobia' stressed by L. De Marchi.

The reference here was, rather, to the possibility that the experience of sex — in relation not to the need to restrain mere mortals and to moralise, but rather in relation to individuals with supernatural aspirations — could lead precisely in the negative direction of a 'descending self-transcendence'. And if we examine the predominant use of sex among the most recent

generations, we find a reflection of this even on a very profane level: no ‘sweet’ sacrifice of oneself, no ‘carnal offering’ that redeems and leads to the One, but only intercourse used in the same way as drugs (or, to be more precise, in the same way as the current profane and pandemic use of drugs) to draw from the extreme feeling of the orgasm the illusory confirmation of the sense of self (the exact opposite of the upward direction).

When the One is ‘the night in which all cows are black’, every difference is disputed and dismissed, and promiscuity in the name of that One becomes a norm even in the forms that are most repugnant for every well-born person. Cogni is explicit in this regard, and demonstrates, if nothing else, the courage of coherence. He claims, for example, that ‘every doctrine that starts from the absolute and not relative point of view, from hierarchical inferiority or superiority, is erroneous in its very foundations, if it is true that the One is all and identical to Brahman’. Note that these words (p. 156) are stated with regard to the difference between species — for example, between men and animal species. We can only imagine how they apply to the human domain. Cogni will certainly not object if — to the greater glory of the Vedantic One — a young Nordic girl beds a Zulu Negro or an Australian aborigine whose morphological and mental level corresponds to the stone age. He is certainly a hardcore egalitarian, a fanatic ‘integrationist’ (he rushed to make an act of contrition, updating his views in relation to a ‘past error’, since he had been a racist in the Fascist period, albeit one subscribing to what in my view is a dubious racial theory), an admirer of ‘unisex’ and the ‘third sex’, and so on. But the last straw is in the area of carnality. As a more audacious form of identification — whether ‘phagic’ or not — in the name of the One, he actually admits not only homosexuality and pederasty, but even intercourse with animals, sodomy with women, and so on. His theory explains why ‘relationships of this sort, which are commonly considered to be against nature, have so much appeal for many people.’ ‘Only by accepting in principle what are ordinarily the most repugnant areas of the other [for his/her sexual use], is one certain of having reached absolute identity’ (p. 134). At this rate, we believe that Cogni might end up endorsing even coprophagia (the eating of faeces as a form of eroticism) and sanctifying disgusting actions, insofar as coprophagia is widely featured from an erotic perspective, along with other horrors, in the Days of Sodom by the Marquis de Sade.

Naturally, in denouncing such aberrations on Cogni’s part, I am not appealing to any conformist moralism but to what is called normal in a higher, not social, sense. For example, pederasty at the most can be tolerated when it arises from special constitutional situations of imperfect sexualisation, but it must be stigmatised as a vice, deviation, and perversion in all other cases. In this, as in all other instances of sexual psychopathy, one must deny the presence of the objective conditions required by a metaphysics of sex for actual experiences of a ‘deconditioning intensity’.

But there is no hope that Cogni has any understanding of such matters.

Finally, one must note another deviation in Cogni, which goes hand in hand with promiscuous sexuality and pantheism. Since — as we have seen his reference point is not metaphysical reality but rather the promiscuous ground of ‘Life’, skirting the unconscious and the subconscious,

Spiritual Virility

Cogni in his more recent writings openly sympathises with psychoanalysis and ‘metapsychics’. He goes so far as to say that ‘parapsychology’ ‘still remains the great hope of the future’ (p. 124). He engages in a duet of mutual adulation with Emilio Servadio, who has ‘paved the way’, ‘knowing India in depth and every type of initiatic thought and psychic depth’.

This makes me smile. If Servadio ever had any idea of initiatic matters and authentic wisdom, it was when, before the war, he was vividly interested in the publications of the ‘Ur Group’, which I directed. After the war, taking one step ahead and two back, he more or less set all this aside and immersed himself in psychoanalysis — what’s more, on a lucrative professional level, seeking to gain as much publicity for himself as he could. He associated psychoanalysis with ‘parapsychology’, in place of initiatic knowledge and wisdom traditions, setting out to probe not the ‘psychical depths’ but rather the ‘slums of the psyche’. Cogni had no trouble establishing a connection with psychoanalysis and metapsychics, insofar as his One can easily be associated with the ‘deep unconscious that is one throughout the universe’, thus explaining telepathic phenomena and metapsychics in general (p. 109), while being the field proper to psychoanalysis. In these new disciplines the unconscious becomes *de facto* a repository for all sorts of things. Such an elementary and basic distinction as that between the subconscious (or unconscious) and the superconscious is completely ignored, partly for the simple reason that psychoanalysts and metapsychists have no idea of the latter, and partly because it is unlikely to come into play in their experimental field, for obvious reasons. Hence too aberrant assimilations such as those of C. G. Jung, who equates the figures perceived by psychopaths or dream visions with the symbols and mythical structures of the initiatic and religious field, reducing everything to the emergence of ‘archetypes’ out of the collective unconscious. Now, it still holds that, apart from psychoanalysis and its murky world, all modern ‘parapsychology’ only embraces the offal of the extra-normal and is foreign to anything that might possess an authentically spiritual value. It deals with ‘slums’ which will only impress the naïeve.

But given what has been said, the reason for Cogni’s

interest in such things is evident: we are dealing here with true elective affinities. It is at this level that he situates what he calls the ‘great hope’ — signs of the times.

In conclusion, the present considerations have shown that Cogni’s mentality, personal equation, elective affinities and theoretical points of reference have no contact with a spiritual world that we presume is not at all personal. In cases of this sort, as was stated at the beginning, discussions have little meaning. However, with these notes I have sought not so much to ‘argue’ as to clarify certain issues of unquestionable relevance for those readers who might have an interest in the topics under consideration.

The Races of the Spirit

Some questions for discussion: Does the concept of “spiritual race” simply amount to types of

character? If so, then why speak of spiritual races at all? Why not reserve “race” for the biological realm and speak of character types, which are shaped by culture, habituation, and ideas as well as genes?

We all recognize that people can be racially white but act like Jews or blacks because of culture and upbringing. And we also recognize white character traits in some non-whites. The ideal, of course, should be the preservation of the white race along with a distinctively white culture and character.

Given a choice between the two, however, the most important thing is to preserve the race. Even if all of white civilization were entirely wiped out, as long as our race is preserved, white people can produce appropriate civilizations again. But if our race disappears, it hardly matters to me that the Japanese will still be listening to Debussy.

We have to consider the “solar” race as being superior to and having preceded all other races. The solar, or Olympic-solar race, which corresponds to the Hyperborean tradition and line, has the characteristic of a “natural supernaturality.” The fundamental aspects of this “race of the spirit” are power, domineering calm, and promptness to precise and absolute action, and also of a sense of centrality and steadfastness; the virtue referred to by the ancients as numinous, the kind of superiority which imposes itself directly and irresistibly, simultaneously provoking awe and veneration. Through these characteristics, the solar race is naturally predestined to command.

Ice and fire are fused in this race, as in the symbols of its Nordic origin: ice as transcendence and inaccessibility; fire as the radiant quality of solar beings who give life and bring light, always in a context of sovereign remoteness.

The symbolic designations of “divine” or “celestial” race are to be understood as being applied to men who do not believe themselves to be gods, but who feel that they belong to a terrestrial race only by chance, or by “ignorance” or “sleep.” The two terms of *vidya* and *avidya*, from the ancient Indo-Aryan teachings, meaning respectively knowledge (of the Supreme Identity) and ignorance, are to be comprehended exactly in this sense.

The other races of the spirit, to whom our contemporaries belong, presuppose a separation of the two elements of spirituality and virility which are found in the solar race.

We shall start with the “lunar,” or Demetrian, race. While the solar individual is the one who has in himself his own light and principle, the lunar individual receives from others his own light and principle.

Thus in the lunar race the sense of spiritual centrality has been lost, either through degeneration or passive crossing with other races which have degraded its original solar quality.

By extension, the lunar man is priestly as opposed to the regal man; he is the man who, in the face of the spirit, acts like a normal woman in front of a man, e.g., with a sense of submissiveness and dedication.

Spiritual Virility

Another lunar type is the intellectual, the man of “passive reflection.” In the political field, wherever there is a scission between secular and sacerdotal power, inevitably the lunar spirit emerges: lunar is the dominator who receives authority from someone else, from a sacerdotal caste which is not regal, the supreme consecration of his own power.

The third race of the spirit, which can be singled out on the basis of ancient symbolic traditions, is the “telluric,” or titanic, race. It is a way of being which witnesses the adherence to life in all its instinctivity and irrationality.

The telluric race (from Lat. *tellus*; earth) has an explosive impulsiveness, sudden changeability, and absolute self-identification. This race is as “intensive” as it is gloomy, without however the depth and detachment which are necessary to also be tragic. Sexuality has a considerable part in this race; the sentiment of personality in the telluric man is little developed, it is the collective element that predominates; it is in this sense that blood ties are manifested, and always in a material, atavistic and fatalistic form; this can be recognized in some of the typical aspects of the sentiment of race peculiar to the Jewish people.

The term “telluric” has been used by Keyserling to indicate an indisputable aspect of the so-called contemporary “world revolution.”

The “Dionysian” man has common traits with the titanic one. He is the one who aspires to reconquer the lost level, capable of partly surmounting the human condition through a radical explosion of all forces connected to the senses; but this explosion does not go further than mere ecstasies, where the sensitive is mixed with the supersensitive, where liberation is obtained only at the cost of betraying the affirmative principle of the personality.

It would not be arbitrary to establish a correlation between Dionysian man and the “romantic” man.

From the racial point of view, we should not be surprised when we discover that the Dionysian man, under the romantic cloak, is rather largely represented in the Nordic races, be they Germanic or Anglo-Saxon.

Thus we have reconfirmation of the necessity of distinguishing the primeval Nordic-Aryan race from the recent Nordic races. Rather significant about the latter is the part played by the feminine element at the beginning of historic times (today still, German is the only language amongst those of Indo-European stock in which the word for “sun” [*die Sonne*] is of feminine gender, while “moon” [*der Mond*] is masculine).

A “Demetrian” or lunar race which, in the face of usurpations by titanic or telluric races, does not possess any longer the superior authority peculiar to the solar race, with which to reaffirm itself, will make its own the violent and materialistic forms of its enemy, thus creating a new type, the “Amazonian” man. The Amazonian appears like the woman (an embodiment of lunar spirituality) who, against the abuses of a man (titanic spirituality) will affirm herself by adopting a masculine way of being, thus diverting from her primary nature. The Amazonian man would

then be he who in essence remains lunar, but who affirms himself by displaying strength, a material, non-spiritual strength.

Another race of the spirit is the “Aphroditian” one. In it, tellurism assumes the forms of an extreme refinement of material life, often promoting an opulent development, all of which is luxury and sumptuousness in exterior life, thus also promoting the world of arts and the sentiment of aesthetics. But inside, there remains a passivity and inconsistency of a lunar type, compensated by a particular emphasis given to all which refers to the woman, who in turn is led to exercise a certain domination and to ensure herself, silently, a certain preeminence.

The Aphroditian on one side and the telluric on the other, represent the extreme limits of those forms comprised within the Nordic-Aryan cycle, beyond which one enters the domain of the races of nature.

Lastly, one can consider the “race of heroes.” The term hero is here understood not in the common sense, but rather with reference to the mythical traditions described by Hesiod, following which in the cycles of a humanity which was already deviated and materialized, Zeus, e.g., the Olympic principle, would have generated a race capable of re-conquering through action the primordial state, the “Golden” or “solar” state of the first generation of the Hyperborean cycle. Outside the myth is a question of a type in which the “Olympic,” solar quality is no longer a nature, but a duty, to be carried out by means of an internal transformation, an overcoming, often achieved through a “second birth” or initiation, the latter alone being capable of rendering of the present times that which had become latent, and of making it possible to regain what was lost.

The Swastika

Various authors have written about the symbol that the new Germany has made into its emblem. We take up the subject here only to treat it from a special point of view, essentially considering the primordial traditions and the universal higher meanings potentially contained in that symbol.

First of all, where does the swastika come from? And is it true that it is the symbol of a specific race, namely of the Aryan or Indo-Germanic race? This is what was believed in some circles in the nineteenth century, and some continue even today to assume it to be the case. Ernst Krause and Ludwig Müller argued that the symbol in ancient times was specific to the Indo-Germanic peoples. However, this thesis has proved to be untenable. This is because of the diffusion of the symbol, which has been demonstrated by later research. In 1896, the American Thomas Wilson drew a map which clearly shows that the swastika is to be found even in places – California, Korea, Mesopotamia, Central America, Japan, North Africa, and so on – that certainly do not correspond to the ancient settlements of the Indo-Germanic race as it was conceived at that time. Nor should we forget that the symbol in question is also found in Italic prehistory (engraved, for example, on certain ritual axes found in Piedmont and Liguria) long before the appearance of the

Germanic peoples, and appears in Rome, even on some some Imperial coins.

Furthermore, there is a fundamental consideration that must be made, namely, that every true symbol is by nature universal. Thus, however much a symbol may be predominantly used by a particular race or religion, this use can never constitute a monopoly. This applies to symbols such as the circle with a point at its center, the five- or six-pointed star (wrongly believed to be an exclusively Jewish symbol), the simple cross, and so on, including the swastika or hooked cross [German Hakenkreuz], or whatever one wishes to call it. If the problem is now posed concerning which race originally originally adopted the latter symbol, rather than referring to the Indo-Germanic, Indo-European, or (in the general sense) Aryan race, it is necessary to refer to an even more ancient and primordial human race, which some call pre-Nordic and which we term Hyperborean. This race goes back many thousands of years before the Common Era and, in fact, not without reason, some have called the swastika das Gletscherkreuz, the “cross of the glaciers,” this sign already appearing at the end of the Ice Age, when the migrations of the aforementioned Hyperborean race began. These migrations, to the extent that it has been possible to reconstruct them with a certain verisimilitude, partly explain the presence of the swastika in areas which later were inhabited by races that were different from the descendants of that primordial human race. One may therefore assume that the symbol has in some cases has been transmitted, while in other cases, it may have presented itself independently to the human spirit, precisely because of the aforementioned universal and objective character of every true symbol.

And now we come to the meaning of the swastika. According to the most current interpretations, it is a solar symbol and a symbol of fire. As a solar symbol, it is thought to express the rotating movement of the Sun. It is thought to be a symbol of fire because its shape is supposed to reproduce that of the wooden tools with which, by means of friction, fires were lit in ancient times among some Aryan peoples. This is the more external interpretation; it can, however, serve as a basis for higher interpretations, in correspondence with that hierarchy of meanings which every true Traditional symbol always contains within itself.

First of all, the swastika as a solar symbol leads us back to the solar cult. Thus it occurs, for example, as a symbol of Vishnu, and is found on prehistoric ritual objects, linked to “Uranic” (sky) cults such as that of the thunderbolt. At this point, however, we must immediately guard ourselves against the “naturalistic” prejudice – that is, the assumption that the great ancient civilizations, in their religions, were merely superstitiously divining natural phenomena. Precisely the reverse is true: In those ancient cults, these phenomena of nature were mighty cosmic symbols of spiritual forces – and only “positivistic” obtuseness succeeded in making people believe anything else, in spite of the great quantity of precise and concordant testimonies that, in this regard, may be found in the most diverse civilizations.

Starting from this observation, the solar cult should therefore be understood to essentially refer to a luminous spiritual force, to that same force by virtue of which, using an analogous symbolism, one was able to speak of a life which is the “light of men.” And in Romanesque imagery, we find the swastika associated with the “Tree of Life.” This religion of light – with the frequent

recurrence of the “solar” motif, and, in its highest forms, of the Olympian motif – is characteristic of all the major Aryan civilizations created by the aforementioned Hyperborean race. The religion of light is opposed to the “telluric,” demonic, or feminine-naturalistic character of the cults of non-Aryan races, which focused above all on the invisible forces symbolized by the elements, by the earth, by the animal world, and by chthonic vegetation.

Let us now move one further step forward, first of all noting that an intimate relationship was always conceived to exist between the Sun and the divine fire, as is confirmed especially by the ancient Aryan testimonies of the East and West. Secondly, let us recall the other relationship conceived between – on the one hand – kingship; the function of sovereignty [imperium] in general; the characteristics of a dominating super-race, race, or caste; and – on the other hand – the solar motif. In primordial traditions, this appears very distinctly: we find a solar “mysticism” of kingship and glory. Like the agni-rohita, the Vedic fire, like the ancient Egyptian ânshûs, is the “royal conquering force,” an igneous fluid of power and life that was an attribute of kings, and like the Aryo-Iranian hvarenô is a celestial flame, a solar fire of which the whole Aryan race is the bearer, but which was above all concentrated in its leaders. Cumont has demonstrated that the small golden statue that was transmitted from one Roman emperor to another as a sign of power is a personification of this same mystical, fateful force, which among the Hellenes had become that of the “destiny” of a city or a nation.

On the basis of these ideas, one of the higher meanings of the symbolism of the swastika immediately becomes clearer: It may refer to a principle that generates fire and flame – but in a higher sense; it is that flame and fire which point back to the Aryan cult of the Sun and of light; it is that symbolic fire which played such an important part in the ancient patrician family cult; it is the mystical fire, finally, which finds its supreme manifestation in leaders and sovereigns. Therefore, in the highest sense, the swastika, the “cross of the glaciers,” could be called the mysterious seal of primordial spirituality itself, which then manifested itself and ignited in the various dominant castes or races, affirming itself in the face of inferior forces and races in a whole cycle of ancient civilizations. Therefore, it can only refer through distant analogy to the material instrument once used to generate fire and flame. The sacral and spiritual meaning remains in the foreground.

Related to this, we must now say something about the swastika as a “polar symbol.” Let us hasten to warn the reader that, although we have spoken of Hyperborean races and glaciers, we are not speaking of the Arctic regions here. Instead, we are referring to the symbolism of the pole, which, in the Primordial Traditions, is also strictly connected with the idea that one had of the true sovereign function. According to this view, the head represents stability, the immobile point around which the orderly movement of the forces that depend on it occurs. Thus, for example, in a text by Confucius we read: “He who dominates through the celestial virtue resembles the pole star: it stands firm in its place, while all the stars turn around it.” Here, we can see that the Aristotelian notion of the so-called “unmoved mover” takes up the same idea in theological terms (of the one who sets in motion without himself moving): an idea which,

moreover, we find again in a particular Aryan doctrine, that of the cakravartî.

The cakravartî represents a kind of limit-form of the Imperial idea. It is the figure of a “universal sovereign” or “king of the world” in general. The term, however, literally means “he who turns the wheel” – which in this context means the wheel of the regnum [kingdom, empire, Reich] – himself appearing as the center, pole, or fixed point that supports the wheel’s regular motion. We have, then, a double motif: on the one hand, the idea of a spinning movement, which in some cases also appears as an irresistible and overwhelming force (according to that ancient doctrine, those who are predestined to sovereignty have a vision of a whirling celestial wheel); on the other hand, the “polar” idea, that is, that of a still point, of something calm, perfectly mastered, “Olympian,” testifying to a superior nature.

In the sign of the swastika we can find precisely these two elements. Guénon has rightly pointed out that if, in a certain sense, it can be considered a symbol of movement, it is not a matter simply of movement, as some claim, but of a rotational movement around a center or an immobile axis: and it is this fixed point that is the essential element to which the symbol in question refers. The same must apply, then, if the movement refers to the Sun: This is not a symbolism having to do with the perennial story of the birth and the decline of light, but a sign that, beyond that cyclical movement of the Sun, conceives of this power as something central, immutable, or Olympian, to the point of being – if you will – a confused anticipation of the modern Copernican view, but arrived at through religious meanings. Apart from this, the meanings already indicated above are confirmed in this symbol. It is also a “polar” symbol. From earliest prehistory, it bore within itself those unmanifested meanings, which had to unfold in the luminous cycle of the Aryan mythologies or sovereignties – or when not Aryan, in any case derived from the aforementioned Primordial Tradition.

Moreover, it may be noted that “polar” symbolism was traditionally also applied to certain civilizations or organizations when they incarnated the significance of “centers” in history as a whole. Thus, as is known to all, for example, the ancient Chinese empire was called the “Middle Kingdom”; Mount Meru, the Mount Olympus of the Indo-Aryans, was, as the seat of the divine forces, considered to be the “pole” of the Earth; the symbolism of the so-called omphalos, which was applied to the center of the ancient Doric-Apollonian tradition of Greece, to Delphi, brings us back to the same meaning; Asgard in the Nordic-Germanic tradition, which was held to be the mystical homeland of the Nordic royal lineages up to the time of the Goths, is identified with Midgard, which means precisely dwelling, or land, of the center. Even the name of Cuzco, the center of the Inca solar empire, seems to express, like the omphalos of the Hellenes, the idea of “centrality.” These elements are susceptible to interesting developments as part of what we might call a “sacred geography.” In any case, it is important to note the close relationship between these various manifestations and a single fundamental idea.

In any case, going back to the double element comprised by the swastika, as well as similar signs (the three-armed wheel of the triskelion and some rose windows of Gothic cathedrals are traces of the same symbolism), we can summarize the highest spiritual meaning of the symbol: The

rotating swastika manifests the dynamism of a vorticose and overwhelming force (the wheel), generating light and fire, the “Uranic” flame, the solar flame, while remaining, in its center, a commanding calm, an immutable stability – the latter corresponding, on its plane, to the fundamental condition of every true regere [Latin “to rule,” from Proto-Indo-European root *reg-, “to move in a straight line,” in contrast to the aforementioned rotating movement] and of every great organization of the forces of history.

We can now ask ourselves to what extent knowledge of these higher meanings and, in general, of the traditions to which we have referred here played a part in the choice of the swastika as the emblem of Germanic National Socialism. In this decision, we believe, a “subconsciousness” has above all acted – and this is not the only case in which, today, through an obscure instinct, primordial symbols have come to light again and been brought to new life without any knowledge of the deeper meanings sealed within them. On the contrary, in processes of this kind, entirely contingent elements often play the part of “occasional causes,” a part which, however, only diminishes the value of the result from a very superficial point of view. Thus, in the case of Germany, there is no doubt that the symbol treated here was first suggested by certain anti-Judaic currents, which defended very simplistic and militant political adaptations of the Indo-Germanic and Aryan myth, in a one-dimensional form which has already been rendered antiquated by serious research. Also, as far as meanings go, if Hitler, at the time of writing *Mein Kampf*, believed that he could use the swastika to symbolize “the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man, and, by the same token, the victory of the idea of creative work, which as such always has been and always will be anti-Semitic,” we see that he did not go beyond a quite relative level. Subsequently, in Germany the symbol has been written about from a point of view that is not merely political. It has, however, rarely been considered in its most universal meanings: Indeed, as far as we know, it has not always been the Germans who have highlighted the most interesting aspects of the “cross of the glaciers.” Moreover, to be honest, the same could be said of certain equally primordial symbols, such as the axe in the fasces, which has been taken up by Fascism. Once again, it seems to have been a matter of instinct and “race,” rather than of precise knowledge. It will therefore be interesting to see if circumstances and callings will ensure that the most profound, spiritual contents of the signs in question will awaken corresponding forces, so that the symbols themselves will become active in history.

The Sanskrit name svastika can also be interpreted as a monogram made up of the letters which make up the propitiatory formula suasti. The meaning of this Indo-Aryan formula is the equivalent of the Latin *bene est*, or *quod bonum faustumque sit* – that is to say: “may that which is good and auspicious, be.” Thus, the symbol in question also contains the best conceivable auspice in regard to the future developments of the great world movement which the two Axis nations have brought forth, rising again precisely under the sign of the Axe and the “cross of the glaciers.”

from "**The Theory of the Absolute Individual**"

"Considering the common experience of the world, its elementary condition can be considered to be knowing, in its most generic sense of awareness of a certain static or dynamic determination. Moreover, it is usual to distinguish object from subject, a distinction which is legitimate, provided that the terms are properly understood.

1. The "objective," positively, can only be the consciousness of its aspect of determinateness, of qualification; the subjective, this same consciousness taken instead according to its aspect of awareness or certainty in general. Considering things in this way means formulating the idealistic thesis in its most elementary form, which results in an almost trivial evidence as soon as we pay attention to it. It is evident, in fact, that it is inconceivable that an object could be defined by an absolute otherness with respect to the subject of experience; that all the determinations for which and with which the object is known- to whatever order they refer, including its own possible relative "aseity", its dependence or independence from the Ego- are and are certain insofar as they are particular determinations of consciousness, in the knot of which what is called reality is borrowed without residue. This can also be expressed by saying that identity is the elementary datum, the original substance of knowing. Determinateness- the objective- instead of being linked to a direct perception or sensation can proceed from judgment, inference, position; but, in any case, that it remains simply the "known," therefore precisely simple phenomenon of consciousness - this is a proposition in itself self-evident, to which one cannot but adhere without falling into contradiction. Thus the criticism of realism is very simple and well-known: it refutes itself precisely at the point of claiming to be true. In fact, if it is true, as it claims, that the idea or thought is something different from the real, that the object exists in itself, then realism itself, which in any case is something other than the realm of reality, is not true. realism itself, which in any case cannot be anything other than an idea or a system of ideas, can in no way demonstrate the congruence of its conception with the system of reality (1). Therefore, if it is true, it refutes itself: the real of which, according to sensible discourse, it speaks, falls in one way or another in the experience of the subject.

Thus the subject as consciousness presents itself as the ether that underlies all that world, which is its world. It is not included in the world, but the latter within it, and within it it unfolds. The well-known formula of transcendental idealism corresponding to this is: the world is my representation, understood as including not only imagining and perceiving, but also every datum elaborated by the faculties of reflection, since this datum will always be, in *primis et ante omnia*, a simple determinateness of consciousness. In this first degree, however, idealism is at one with experimental positivism and with a rigorous phenomenism."

Action, Contemplation and the Western Tradition

Esoterically, when we speak of 'tradition', we mean the 'transmission' (*traditio*) from

generation to generation of a ‘presence’ of ‘transcendent’ nature, just as a flame lights another flame. A chain of individuals thus becomes the mediator of a continuity of contact with metaphysical reality and a non-human force.

This transmission can happen in an elite existing as a hidden vein behind the great historical and ethnic forces. But it can also occur that the occult shows itself and dominates, that is to say, that, in a given civilisation, all activities become organised around this elite, which becomes their manifest centre, the axis from which they draw their meaning and their orientation in a system of hierarchic participation.

All the original civilisations, albeit to varying degrees, have a traditional character in this sense. It must however be noticed that, from a certain point, a law of differentiation comes into play. When it appears as spirit of a given epoch or civilisation, the metaphysical identity bifurcates itself. In its most immediate manifestation, it produces two distinct trunks and gives rise to two fundamental forms.

The two trunks are: action and contemplation.

The two related forms are: royal initiation and sacerdotal initiation – hence there are two types of tradition: warlike-magic tradition and ascetic-contemplative or Brahmanic tradition.

The Two Traditions

Mortal life’s rule is ‘flow’. It does not possess Being, and, caught in varying external fortunes, it moves, restless, in the world of particular things and temporal interests. This law has been pointed out many times in these pages. Above this is the area of Being, according to which life becomes basis, reason and value in itself, gains stability, possesses in itself its own principle. Identical to that of the incorruptible and the eternal, this area can be reached either by means of Action as well as by means of Contemplative Knowledge.

Action can lead to it insofar as it is pure. At the inferior limit, there is the purity of the one who follows faithfully the rule of his own life and gives to his action the meaning of a rite and of a sacrificial offering. On a higher plane, there is the internalization and development of this bent in the one who acts without aiming at contingent and particular fruits, considering as the same happiness and calamity, good and evil, even victory and defeat, looking neither at the ‘I’ nor at the ‘you’, overcoming love as well as hatred and any other pair of opposites. This man sets himself free from the individual condition; in the supranatural certainty of a borderline intensity, here ‘life’ is reversed into a ‘more-than-life’ and the contact with a state of light and power is achieved, which surpasses, dominates and carries off everything that is of a merely human or material order, giving way to actions, excitements and visions which would be impossible otherwise. We may summarize this as: heroic state, magic state, state of the Master of the Law. By transposition: warlike caste – warlike-magic and warlike traditions – finally: royal and imperial traditions.

Spiritual Virility

In contemplation the metaphysical state, rather than by the means of assertion and liberation of action, is achieved by rejecting action. In the higher forms it resembles the fire of an intellectual catharsis. The bond of individuation dissolves in knowledge, in universality, in a vision of an eternal kind. It is the impulse towards the One. It is the path of the mystic identifications whose direction is opposed to that which leads towards form and differentiation. To summarize: ascetic (in a specific sense) and sacerdotal state. By transposition: sacerdotal caste, mediator and bearer of the sacred – sacerdotal, hieratic-sapiential and religious-pontifical (the king-priest) traditions.

It should be noted that these two forms of tradition are to be considered as distinct not insofar as that each of them would be based on a term which the other would be deprived of, but, rather, insofar as that each of them has both but in a different hierarchical order. As a matter of fact, the heroic path and the magic path involve ‘asceticism’, yet according to action, achieved as a way of being of action. Conversely, high contemplation is realisation and as such entails the element ‘action’, which, however, remains here dependent on pure knowledge, interest in the universal and pure transcendence. In the same way, on the concrete and historical plane a tradition of a warlike kind can certainly admit sacerdotal castes, but subordinated to the royal and warlike castes, that is to say that it is characterised by a synthesis of what is sacred and what is royal which is determined by the predominance of the active and sovereign aspect of the force from above. The opposite occurs in the other case: for example, here the warlike caste is given the role of defending the sacerdotal caste and of being its secular arm.

The spirit of both traditions having been briefly and approximatively indicated, we offer a few suggestions as to what ‘Western Tradition’ may mean.

The modern world and Christianity

First of all, it must be borne in mind that it is not possible to speak in any way of ‘Tradition’ in the West if one identifies the West with the ‘modern world’, that is, with the civilisation which has developed in Europe from the century of the Renaissance onwards with the ideologies of the French revolution and the advent of science and technology.

Such civilisation, in fact, systematically destroyed the premise of any tradition, whatever type it may be, and, thus, the contact with the metaphysical reality and the hierarchical coordination of the activities and the ways of living based on the principles which are related to this reality. The ‘modern world’ is characterised by a development along purely material, practical, and industrial lines, in which what is at work is completely human and social forces, and, moreover, by the fact that forces once turned towards transcendence, towards what in man goes beyond man, so as to at least counterbalance purely material and temporal interests, instead stir, incite, and foment what has a practical, political, and merely human character, so as to make every higher point of reference vanish.

What opposes the modern world to any traditional civilisation, what is at the root of all its crises and precludes it from healing is not so much its being a body without spirit as its being a body which has reduced the spirit to being its instrument. This is why it is meaningless to refer in any way to a 'Western Tradition' if it is the modern West that we have in mind. The modern West and anti-tradition are the same thing. The fact is nonetheless that there were still in Europe, at least until a certain period, centres in possession of esoteric knowledge, that is, of the occult tradition. However, even though those centres had a genuine Western character, they did not exert a direct influence on the formation of the overall civilisation, when it comes to tradition in the broad sense. The modern West has constructed itself by breaking from any influence of that kind.

If anything, it is 'counter-initiation' (1) which has played this role of influence.

In the second place, it is a matter of not granting to the religion which has come to prevail in the West either the character of a true, complete tradition, or of a 'Western Tradition'. In support of the second point, Pietro Negri has already made some interesting observations (2). On the whole, what follows must be borne in mind.

No doubt, Christianity, and especially Catholicism, had for centuries the power to organise the various races in the West according to its unique corpus of doctrines and faiths. However, it is questionable whether this corpus retained within itself any higher elements of a truly metaphysical character and whether the organisation which is usually indicated generically as 'Christian civilisation' was ever 'traditional' in the complete sense of which we have spoken. We must distinguish very clearly between religion as a devotional, emotional, and popular fact accompanied by theologising philosophy, dogma and apologetics, on the one hand, and spirituality as metaphysical realisation by means of regular initiation, on the other. Faith, hope, charity, the 'need of the soul', the 'fear of God', and all elements of that kind by themselves do not lead by an inch beyond what is merely human, nor have they had anything to do with true spirituality, either with a heroic spirituality or a tradition of sacred knowledge.

But it is precisely a body of elements of that kind which, in fact, makes up the substance of the Christian tradition, in which it takes the place of spirituality, and this results in the frequent and contaminating humanisation of the divine. That, in spite of this, in rites and symbols taken to a large extent from previous or different traditions, the consciousness of the most profound meaning of which is however almost always nonexistent, the Christian tradition still retains traces of a metaphysical teaching – this is too little for a real and operative traditional 'orthodoxy', as opposed to a merely formal one.

The human, devotional plane, or rather the plane of theological speculation onto which these traditional traces have been transposed and within which they have been preserved, is not a plane on which they can be completely validated. And it is Catholicism itself which gives the confirmation of this: with the harsh loathing it has always nursed for any attempt to complete on esoteric lines its doctrines – from some 'non-orthodox' branches of the Greek Patristic Age and that of the Gnostics to that of the Templars and of various Christian Hermeticists, and to today.

Nowadays, Catholicism worries much more about ‘getting sorted out’ with ‘modern thought’ than about gaining height in any way through elements of esoteric character.

Experientially, leaving aside the merely charismatic or sacramental life, whose significance we will speak of on another occasion, in Christianity everything comes down to the climactic achievements of some mystics, who do not form any tradition, any continuity or chain and do not have any determining, standard-setting, regular or direct relation with the centre of orthodoxy. Moreover, Christianity cannot claim, with respect to the West, the character of a native tradition, congenital to its races, as is the case for, for instance, Brahmanism for Hindus, Islam for the Arabs, or the whole Far-Eastern tradition. Christianity asserted itself in the West on the ruins of a previous Western tradition, which had its achieved heroic and sacred traditional character; with that former world it has maintained only a very relative and apparent continuity, in spite of everything it has borrowed and has sought to absorb and ratify.

A great part has been played within Christianity by influences that are in no way Western or even, more broadly, Aryan: influences deriving either from Judaism or from the devious substratum of pre-Aryan and anti-Aryan Mediterranean spirituality. In some cases, these influences are limited to the superficial, to the most popular and sentimental aspects of Christianity. In other cases, however, they corrode the essence. The doctrine of Original Sin, the exacerbated dualism, the very concept of ‘Redemption’, the anti-Olympian root theme of the god who suffers, dies, and rises again, all this shows the presence of external influences, neither Aryan, nor Western, in Christianity and in Catholicism itself (3).

This is why we think that, in regard to the ‘modern world’ and to the ‘Christian world’, it would be risky to speak, in general, of a ‘Western tradition’.

The Real Western Tradition

This is no longer the case, however, if we return to the ancient Aryo-Mediterranean and Roman world. We find here, albeit interspersed with forces from various other traditions, traces of a formative force and of a spirituality to which the true face of the West can be specifically attributed. This force and this spirituality refer to a tradition of an essentially heroic type. If, from the principle, already indicated, which defines a warlike tradition we deduce its expression on the plane of conditioned events, we find forms and ideas which characterise precisely the Western civilisation and spirit. On the most external plane, the law of action actually finds expression in the style of races of navigators, conquerors, colonisers – in the Homeric and Roman epic world: a free, liberated, heroic world, devoid of uncertainties, of any idea of an ‘infinite’ in the romantic sense, constituted of simple forces and elementary purities: the Doric style, the Roman virtus, the monumental element, the solar ideal of the Imperium, the type of Augustus.

Further, action requires objects, limits, boundaries: it implies form, difference, individuation. While within a sacerdotal tradition form [there] is almost always only symbol, concealment of a mysterious, ineffable, incorporeal spirituality, in the opposite tradition the form almost always

gains importance and value. Here the physical and the metaphysical, the material and the immaterial, the corporeal and the incorporeal coincide in the balance of two coessential terms, in very distinct and intensively individuated types and forms. In fact, here we find the classico-Aryan cult of form, strength, corporeal perfection, of beauty itself as expressions of spirituality; here is a natural overcoming of the dualisms of Levantine character; here is the anti-romantic doctrine, and, therefore, everything that is ‘infinite’ is seen as an abstract potentiality, an imperfection and the finite, on the contrary, is seen as a value, recognising in it the limit of a force which has managed to give a form, a law, an achieved individuality to itself. The particular value assumed by law refers, partly, to the same order of ideas.

The eye which stops at form and at limit sees harmony and number. Hence, from the time of Mediterranean antiquity, in Greece and in Rome, we see the blossoming of sacred sciences based on number and harmony; a heritage perhaps esoteric, within which precedents in Chaldea, but, more immediately, Egyptian contributions of archaic Atlantico-Western origin, assume a very special development. If, compared with such sciences, the quantitative method of the modern exact sciences (which were formed almost exclusively in the West) represents a degenerative deviation, yet it is a degeneration which starts from the same stock. Something similar could even be said of Western rationalism, which started in Greece: the passion for the concept in the sense of distinct, definite, precise notion, which means this and nothing else, in the sense of notion which measures (mens could derive from mensurare, and a similar derivation can be supposed for ratio) is something specifically Western, which equally reveals the law of action, which, asserting itself, implies limit, difference.

When it prevails over contemplation, action thus moves in a definite world, constituted of forms, governed by a law of difference and, therefore, of plurality too: many forces, many consciousnesses, many types, distinct and unmistakable, almost ‘Microcosms within the Macrocosm’, since each of them contains and resolves in its own being the amorphous cosmic possibility. What is thus particularly significant for the Western Tradition is the Aristotelian vision of the world, which is characterised by the fact that, in a being, it considers what is ‘universal’ as less real, more abstract, incomplete (steresis – privation (of being)); the particular, on the contrary, it considers to be what has value, what is desirable, what is more than real, the fulfillment or end (telos) of a being. The Aristotelian doctrine of the sunolon is that, specifically classic, doctrine of the idea or of the ‘engendering force’ which is really real when it actualises itself, individuates itself, asserts itself as power and life of a form, in an indissoluble unity.

Naturally, this should not lead us to attribute to the Western vision of the world a mere pluralism or individualism. There is still a unity, the world is not pure plurality, but rather cosmos, universe, divine order. However, in a warlike tradition, this unity does not have the exclusivist emphasis that the opposite tradition, the ascetic-contemplative one, grants it. Whence, too, the sense of polytheism of the pre-Christian Western world, considerably different from the Oriental one: it is focused, above all, on the concrete and individuated form of the divine powers at work in things, in heroes, in completed types as living works of art, within this clear and harmonious

cosmos whose beauty the poets would sing and whose hidden laws and secret analogies the initiates would penetrate.

What is also typical is the importance that, especially in the ancient Roman world, the notion of numen had. The ancient Roman-Occidental man was inclined to conceive any divinity not so much as deus but rather as numen, that is, as a force, a power, which was defined essentially through its action. Moreover, he would differentiate himself from the Greek spirit by the emphasis he would put on the political and historical element. While, in Greece, the contemplative tendency saw to it that the divine world was conceived of as a sort of atemporal supreworld and, so to speak, as absolute space, Rome strained to grasp this world in its manifestation in time, in history, in the state, in the actions and creations of men, without however diminishing its august character in any manner thereby. The Roman, much more than the Jew, had the sense of a sacred history. The Roman conception of the state, of law, and of the Imperium was based essentially on this historical sense, active and sacred at the same time. The warlike and political caste in Rome typically held a sacred dignity.

Many traces of the 'heroic truth' were found in the West on the plane of initiatic myth too. Among the origin myths opposed to that, also present in the archaic Mediterranean, of the 'fall', there is that of the 'heroes' and of the sons greater than their fathers, who dominated the Mothers and reconquered the realm of the killed father.

This mysterious knowledge, which sometimes appears as that of the 'immaterial race of those without king', passed into certain initiatic currents, in the symbols of which new references to the active, creative spirit are not lacking. We will limit ourselves to indicating the symbolism of building and to recalling how in Hermetism it is spoken of not as much as a knowledge but rather as an art, which was generally called *ars regia*. Its formula: 'corporealise the spirit, spiritualise the body', reconfirms the anti-mystical and anti-ecstatic classico-Occidental ideal. The red and the gold, and not the white, mark here the supreme fulfillment. In the Graal [wouldn't 'Grail' be more appropriate?] tradition the warlike theme and the *Regnum* motif reappear, as they will continue to do in secret centres until the period of the later Rosicrucianism. More generally, we must note the persistence in the very Western Middle Ages of the symbol of magic, which, instead of exhausting itself on the lower plane of a mere science of psychic powers, was closely linked to a particular interpretation of the initiatic ideal. And if, as pointed out, the development of positive sciences is a characteristic of the West, it is based on the tendency to an active knowledge and to a clarity which, even though it fell to a lower level and exerted itself only in a material and physical field, is nonetheless significant as a component of the Western spiritual attitude.

Christianity, whose external, non-Western and non-Aryan aspects have already been pointed out by us, is a maimed and truncated tradition of the hieratic-sacerdotal type which has managed to prevail over a tradition of the heroic type which predominated in the most ancient Mediterranean and, in general, Aryo-Western world.

But Christianity achieved this supremacy only insofar it adapted many forms peculiar to traditions different from it, especially that of Rome. It was more Roman Catholicism than Christianity which won in the West and, in its turn, Catholicism had its golden age in the feudal, knightly and crusading Middle Ages; and, until it decayed into mere spurious forms, the active and conquering contribution found expression in the proselytising, missionary, and supremacist instinct that Christianity displayed, from its beginnings to Protestantism and Calvinism.

The tradition to which the event in Palestine gave birth has thus the character of an ambiguous and almost contradictory thing. However, it is precisely to this contradictoriness that Christianity owes its force; it has given to it, until lately, the means to control races congenitally inspired by a warlike tradition, such as the Western one, before their complete secularisation and terrestrialisation. If Christianity is a counterfeiting of a tradition of a really sacred, ascetico-metaphysical, Brahmanic type, the ‘modern world’, which from one day to the next is undermining what remains of the Western religion, represents in its turn, in many respects, a teratological counterfeiting of a tradition of a warlike type.

It is therefore clear that, if it had been at all possible to rebuild a ‘tradition’ in the West, it could only essentially have been done via forces of a heroico-initiatic character, on the basis of a vision of the world of a more or less magical type (in the special sense that is always given here to this word).

Any attempt at a traditional Restoration along other lines in the West would meet quite definite difficulties and would lack any point of application. If this body of barbarian grandeur that the West has built with its civilisation reacted against any soul, that is to say, against any supernatural element intended to recapture it, to hold it up, and to lead it, this reaction would be particularly vigorous if the soul were different from that of the warlike and active races whose degenerated heir the West is.

Clarifications

Just as the West is mainly stamped by the tradition of action, the East is mainly stamped with the tradition of contemplation. We say ‘mainly’ because the East too has known heroic and imperial cycles, and, for instance, it is difficult to find elsewhere such advanced motifs of transcendent justification as in the Bhagavad-Gita. In addition, the example of imperial and warlike Japan, in which, until the collapse of 1945, the ascetic formation of life played a great part, not to mention the frankly esotericist Zen schools, must not be forgotten. Further, for those who understand the tradition in which action prevails over contemplation equally with the one in which we have the opposite relation, as two paths both possible and competent [better as ‘able’] to reach something which is beyond both action and contemplation, independent, as it is, of any particular conditionality, there is no contradiction between the two. These people will abstain from judging either tradition, they will limit themselves to understanding them and realising the truths, the perspectives and the principles that must be asserted, once, according to one’s own nature, one

adheres to one tradition or the other.

There is on the other hand an opposition between them and those who insist on the 'orthodoxy' and supremacy of one of the two traditions, condemning the other as a deviation and an error. This would merely produce the effect of a mental limitation. Yet we must eliminate any cause of misunderstanding by underlining that the supremacy of action in the tradition which corresponds to it has nothing to do with the usurpation of temporal power, since action always amounts here to a means of liberation and has always as its point of reference something transcendent and supersensible.

Ancient royalty can give us points of reference in this connection. Others can be given by Oriental traditions, for instance by the Hindu one, when it speaks of Rajarshi, those who used to be simultaneously clairvoyants and keepers of the tradition of 'solar' knowledge, or when, in the Upanishads, we see figures of Kshatriya (warriors) competing in sacred knowledge with the representatives of the Brahmanic caste. Besides, we must recall the forms of unity of the two powers which appeared in ancient Rome and reappeared, here and there, as residues, in the Middle Ages.

What can be called the primordial tradition is anterior and superior to the bipartition we have discussed. The active path and the contemplative path, let us repeat, are approximations to this supreme unity. When it comes to analogy, despite some people's views, the active and warlike path, as explained here, has at least as much dignity as the other, because, fundamentally, it comprises both principles joined in the supreme synthesis, which is not simply light and liberation, but light and liberation joined in power with the basic principle of any manifestation and determination and with sovereignty.

On that basis, it would be appropriate to mention something to which we may come back later: the idea that the warlike-royal tradition leads normally and legitimately only to the 'Lesser Mysteries'. This is an arbitrary limitation deriving from an abstract doctrinal scheme, which becomes completely absurd when, rather than speaking of 'Lesser Mysteries' and 'Greater Mysteries' as degrees in the same development but as attaining a transcendent character only in the latter, they speak of the duality of the lunar, Demetrian or telluric mysteries on the one hand, and the solar or Uranic mysteries on the other; since, according to a better founded doctrine, the 'Lesser Mysteries' can be associated with the former of these, it is obvious that there is a contradiction between them and the tradition of royalty, except in a few cases of evident degeneration.

In any case, we have now set forth succinctly the general principles on the basis of which the problem of the duality of traditions can be understood, before turning to what follows from it in the study of the metaphysic of history.

Ea

- The texts published in a series of booklets under the name of Ur, from 1927 to 1928, and Krur, in 1929, were compiled and published in 1955 and 1956 in three volumes by Bocca as *Introduzione alla Magia quale Scienza dell'Io* (Introduction to Magic as Science of the Self), then, again in three volumes, by Edizioni Mediterranee in 1971, by Tilopa in 1980 and 1981, and by Fratelli Melita Editori in 1987. The latter of these, to quote the publisher, 'can be considered as an updated edition of that collective work. Compared to the original, it differs in (the exclusion of) texts which have in the meantime been republished verbatim or in further developed form elsewhere by their respective authors, and in that certain monographs have been substituted for others of the same general nature, following a principle of greater coordination, completeness and essentiality, but in the same spirit as the original edition, which followed the criterion of organic and chronological progression.' The currently available edition in English, *Introduction to Magic, Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus* (Inner Traditions, 2001) contains only approximately one-third of the original texts, but not 'Sull'"Azione" e la "Contemplazione" e la Tradizione occidentale'.

- (1) Pietro Negri: 'Della tradizione occidentale' (*Introduzione alla Magia quale Scienza dell'Io*, Fratelli Melita Editori, vol II p. 58) – ('About the Western Tradition').
- (2) Arvo: 'Sulla contro-iniziazione' ('On the Counter-Initiation') (*ibid.*, vol. I p. 268) – ('On the Counter-Initiation', *Introduction to Magic*, Inner Traditions, 2001).
- (3) It must also be noted that, while almost all the greater regular traditions had as their 'sacred language' that of the races in which they formed, this is not the case for the Christian-Catholic tradition, which, in this respect too, appears to be hybrid: its sacred language is Latin, the ancient language of Rome, while the Old and New Testaments, which are the basis of this tradition, were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Coptic.

from "Metaphysics of War"

Liberations

It is a principle of ancient wisdom that situations as such never matter as much as the attitude that is assumed in front of them, and therefore the meaning that is attributed to them. Christianity, generalizing from a similar viewpoint, has been able to speak of life as of a 'test' and has adopted the maxim, *vida est militia super terram*.

In the quiet and ordered periods of history, this wisdom is accessible only to a few chosen ones, since there are too many occasions to surrender and to sink, to consider the ephemeral to be the important, to forget the instability and contingency of what is irremediably such by nature. It is on this basis that what can be called in the broader sense the mentality of bourgeois life is organized: it is a life which does not know either heights or depths, and develops interests, affections, desires, and passions which, however important they may be from the merely earthly point of view, become petty and relative from the supra-individual and spiritual point of view, which must always be regarded as proper to any human existence worthy of the name.

The tragic and disrupted periods of history ensure, by force of circumstances, that a greater number of persons are led towards an awakening, towards a liberation. And, really and essentially, it is by this that the deepest vitality of a stock, its virility and its unshakability in the superior sense, can be measured. And today, in Italy, on that front which by now no longer knows any distinction between combatants and non-combatants, and has therefore seen so many tragic consequences, one should get used to looking at things from this higher perspective to a much greater extent than is usually possible or necessary.

From one day to the next, even from one hour to the next, as a result of a bombing raid, one can lose one's home and everything one most loved, everything to which one had become most attached, the objects of one's deepest affections. Human existence becomes relative – it is a tragic and cruel feeling, but it can also be the principle of a catharsis, and the means of bringing to light the only thing which can never be undermined and which can never be destroyed. We need to remember that, for a complex set of reasons, the superstition which attaches all value to purely individual and earthly human life has spread and rooted itself tenaciously – a superstition which, in other civilizations, was, and remains, almost unknown. The fact that, nominally, the West professes Christianity, has had only a minimal influence in this respect: the whole doctrine of the supernatural existence of the spirit, and of its survival beyond this world, has not undermined this superstition in any significant way; it has not made knowledge of what did not begin with birth, and cannot end with death, able to act practically in the daily, sentimental and biological life of a sufficient number of beings. Rather, people have clung convulsively to that small part of the whole which is the short period of this existence of individuals, and have made every effort to ignore the fact that the hold on reality afforded by individual life is no firmer than that of a tuft of grass which one might grab to save himself from being carried away by a wild current.

Precisely it arouses this awareness, not as something cerebral or 'devotional', but rather as a living fact and liberating feeling, everything which today is tragic and destructive can have, at least for the best of us, creative value. We are not recommending insensitivity, or some misconceived stoicism. Far from it: it is a matter of acquiring and developing a sense of detachment towards oneself, towards things, and towards persons, which should instill a calm, an incomparable certainty, and even, as we have before stated, an indomitability. It is like simplifying oneself, divesting oneself, in a state of waiting, with a firm, whole mind, with an awareness of something which exists beyond all existence. From this state, the capacity will also be found of always being able to recommence, as if ex nihilo, with a new and fresh mind, forgetting what has been, and what has been lost, focusing only on what positive and creative can still be done.

A radical destruction of the 'bourgeois' who exists in every man is possible in these disrupted times, more than in any other. In these times, man can find himself again, can really stand in front of himself, and get used to watching everything according to the look of the other shore, so as to restore to importance, to essential significance, what should be so in any normal existence:

the relationship between life and the ‘more than life’, between the human and the eternal, between the short-lived and the incorruptible.

And to find ways, over and above mere assertion and gimmickry, for these values to be positively lived and to find forceful expression in the greatest possible number of persons in these hours of trial, is undoubtedly one of the main tasks facing the politico-spiritual élite of our nation.

The Decline of Heroism

War and rearmament in the world of the ‘Westerners’ are once again rising securities. Intensive propaganda, with a crusading tone, using all its tried and tested methods, is in the air. Here, we cannot go thoroughly into the concrete questions which concern our specific interests, but rather hint at something more general, one of the inner contradictions of the notion of war, which undermines the foundations of the so-called ‘West’.

The technicist error, of thinking of ‘war potential’ primarily in terms of arms and armaments, special technical-industrial equipment, and the like, and assessing man – according to the brutal expression now widespread in military literature – simply as ‘human material’ – has already been widely criticised. The quality and spirit of the men to whom the arms, the means of offense and destruction, are given, have represented, still represent, and will always represent the basic element of ‘war potential’. No mobilisation will ever be ‘total’ if men whose spirit and vocation are up to the tests which they must face cannot be created.

How are things, in this respect, in the world of the ‘democracies’? They now want, for the third time this century, to lead humanity to war, in the name of ‘the war against war’. This requires men to fight at the same time that war as such is criticised. It demands heroes while proclaiming pacifism as the highest ideal. It demands warriors, while it has made ‘warrior’ a synonym for attacker and criminal, since it has reduced the moral basis of ‘the just war’ to that of a large-scale police operation, and it has reduced the meaning of the spirit of combat to that of having to defend oneself as a last resort.

The Bourgeois Ideal

Let us examine this problem more closely. In what cause should the man of ‘the Western bloc’ go to war and face death? It is obviously nonsensical to say, in the name of the bourgeois ideal, the carefully maintained ‘security’ of existence which abhors risk, which promises that the maximum comfort of the human animal shall be easily accessible to all. Few will be deluded enough to imagine that, by sacrificing themselves, they can secure all this for future generations. Some will try to make others go and fight instead of them, offering as inducements beautiful words about humanitarianism, glory, and patriotism. Apart from this, the only thing a man in such a world will fight for is his own skin.

Spiritual Virility

His skin in Curzio Malaparte's sense, as here: 'Certainly, only the skin is undeniable and tangible. One no longer fights for honour, for freedom, for justice. One fights for this disgusting skin. You cannot even imagine what man is capable of, of what heroisms and infamies, to save his skin.'

If one wants a profession of faith from the democratic world, beyond all its pretenses, it is contained in these words. They express the only credo, leaving aside mere verbiage and lies, with which it can spiritually equip its army. This means, to rush to the crusade against the Communist threat only out of physical terror, of terror for the skin, for the frightening, wavering ideal of Babbitt, of bourgeois safety, of the 'civilization' of the domesticated and standardised human animal, which eats and copulates, and the limits of whose horizon are the Reader's Digest, Hollywood, and the sports stadiums.

Thus, those who are fundamentally lacking in heroism will seek to awaken warriors for the 'defence of the West', by playing upon the complex of anxiety. Since they have deeply demoralised the true Western soul, since they have debased and demeaned, firstly, the true basis of the State, hierarchy, and virile solidarity, and secondly, the notion of war and combat, they must now play the 'trump card' of the anti-Bolshevik crusade.

from "**Revolt Against the Modern World**"

The Two Paths in the Afterlife

At this point it is necessary to discuss the connection between the order of ideas I have outlined so far and the problem of one's destiny in the afterlife. In this context too, reference should be made to teachings that have almost entirely been lost in recent times.

The belief that everybody's soul is immortal is rather odd; very little evidence of it can be found in the world of Tradition. In Tradition, a distinction was made between true immortality, which corresponded to participation in the Olympian nature of a god, and mere survival; also, various forms of possible survival came into play and the problem of the postmortem condition of each individual was analyzed, always taking into consideration the various elements present in the human aggregate, since man was far from being reduced to the simple binomial "soul-body."

What continuously emerges in various forms in ancient traditions is the teaching that in man, in addition to the physical body, there are essentially three entities or principles, each endowed with its own character and destiny. The first principle corresponds to the conscious "I" typical of the waking state, which arose with the body and was formed in parallel with its biological development; this is the ordinary personality. The second principle was called "demon," "manes," "lar," and even "double." The third and last principle corresponds to what proceeds from the first entity after death; for most people, it is the "shadow."

As long as a person belongs to "nature," the ultimate foundation of a human being is the daemon or "demon," (*δαίμον* in Greek); in this context the term does not have the evil connotation Christianity bestowed upon it. When man is considered from a naturalistic point of view, the demon, could be defined as the deep force that originally produced consciousness in the finite form that is the body in which it lives during its residence in the visible world. This force eventually remains "behind" the individual, in the preconscious and in the subconscious dimensions, as the foundation of organic processes and subtle relations with the environment, other beings, and with past and future destiny; these relations usually elude any direct perception. In this regard, in many traditions the demon corresponds to the so-called double, which is perhaps a reference to the soul of the soul or the body itself; this "double" has also often been closely associated with the primordial ancestor or with the totem conceived as the soul and the unitary life that generated a stock, a family, a gens, or a tribe, and therefore it has a broader sense than the one given to it by some schools of contemporary ethnology. The single individuals of a group appear as various incarnations or emanations of this demon or totem, which is the "spirit" pulsating in their blood; they live in it and it lives in them, though transcending them, just as the matrix transcends the particular forms it produces out of its own substance. In the Hindu tradition the demon corresponds to that principle of man's inner being called *liṅga-sarīra*. The word *liṅga* contains the idea of a generating power; hence, the possible derivation of genius from genere, which means to act in the sense of begetting; and hence, the Roman and Greek belief that the genius or lar (demon) is the same procreating force without which a family would become extinct. It is also very significant that totems have often been associated with the "souls" of selected animal species, and that especially the snake, essentially a telluric animal, has been associated in the classical world with the idea of demon or of genius. These two instances bear witness to the fact that in its immediacy this force is essentially subpersonal, and belongs to nature and to the infernal world. Thus, according to the symbolism of the Roman tradition, the seat of the lares is underground; they are in the custody of a female principle, Mania, who is the Mater Larum.

According to esoteric teachings, at the death of the body an ordinary person usually loses his or her personality, which was an illusory thing even while that person was alive. The person is then reduced to a shadow that is itself destined to be dissolved after a more or less lengthy period culminating in what was called "the second death."

The essential vital principles of the deceased return to the totem, which is a primordial, perennial, and inexhaustible matter; life will again proceed from this matter and assume other individual forms, all of which are subject to the same destiny. This is the reason why totems, manes, lares, or penates (the gods of the Roman people, "to whom we owe the breath within us and by whom we possess our bodies and our power of thought") were identified with the dead; the cult of the ancestors, the demons, and the invisible generating force that is present in everybody was often confused with the cult of the dead.

The "souls" of the deceased continued to exist in the dii manes into whom they were dissolved,

but also in those forces of the stock, the race, or the family in which the life of these dii manes was manifested and perpetuated.

This teaching concerns the naturalistic order. There is, however, a second teaching relating to a higher order and a different, more privileged, aristocratic, and sacred solution to the problem of survival after death. It is possible to establish a connection here with the ideas expressed above concerning those ancestors who, through their "victory," bestowed a sacred legacy upon the ensuing patrician generations that reenact and renew the rite.

The "heroes" or demigods to whom the higher castes and the noble families of traditional antiquity traced their lineage were beings who at death (unlike most people or unlike those who had been defeated in the trials of the afterlife) did not emanate a "shadow" or the larva of an ego that was eventually destined to die anyway; instead, they were beings who had achieved the self-subsistent, transcendent, and incorruptible life of a "god." They were those who "had overcome the second death." This was possible because they had more or less directly imposed upon their own vital force that change of nature I mentioned before when talking about the transcendent meaning of "sacrifice." Ancient Egyptian traditions clearly articulated the task of creating out of the ka (another name for the "double" or the "demon") some kind of new incorruptible body (sahu) that was supposed to replace the physical body and "stand on its own feet" in the invisible dimension. In other traditions it is possible to find the identical concept under the names of "immortal body," "body of glory," or "resurrection body." Therefore, if in their traditions the Greeks of Homer's time (as in the first Aryan period when the Vedas were written) did not contemplate the survival of the soul alone, but instead, believed the survivors (those who had been "kidnapped" or "made invisible" by the gods and who had settled in the "island of the blessed," where there is no death) retained soul and body in an indissoluble unity, this should not be understood as a coarse materialistic representation, as many historians of religion today are inclined to believe, but as the symbolic expression of the idea of an "immortal body" and the condition for immortality; this idea enjoyed its classical formulation in Far Eastern esotericism, and more specifically, in operative Taoism. The Egyptian sahu, created by the rite, thanks to which the deceased can go on to live in the company of solar gods, indicates a body that has achieved a high degree of knowledge, power, and glory and that has thus become everlasting and incorruptible. This body is referred to in the following formulation: "Your soul lives, your body germinates eternally at Ra's command without any diminution or defect, just like Ra's." In this context the attainment of immortality or the victory over adverse powers of dissolution is related to wholeness, namely, to the inseparability of the soul from the body—better yet, from a body that does not undergo decay. There is a very suggestive Vedic formula: "Leaving behind every fault, go back home. Filled with splendour, be reunited with your body." The Christian dogma of the "resurrection of the flesh" that will take place on Judgment Day is the last echo of this idea, which can be traced back to prehistoric times.

In these instances death did not represent an end but a fulfillment. It was a "triumphal death" bestowing immortality and was the reason why in some Hellenic traditions the deceased was

called "hero" and dying was called "generating demigods" (ἥρωα γίνεσθαι); or why the deceased was portrayed wearing a crown (often put on his head by the goddesses of victory) made with the same myrtle that identified those who were going to be initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries; or why in the Catholic liturgical language the day of death is called dies natalis (day of birth); or why in Egypt the tombs of the deceased who had been dedicated to Osiris were called "houses of immortality," and the afterlife was conceived as "the land of triumph"; or why in ancient Rome the emperor's "demon" was worshipped as divine, and why the kings, legislators, victorious generals, and founders of those institutions or traditions that were believed to involve an action and a conquest beyond nature were worshipped as heroes, demigods, gods, and avatars of different deities. The sacred foundation of the authority the elders enjoyed in several ancient civilizations lies in similar ideas. People saw in the elders, who were closer to death, the manifestation of the divine force that was thought to achieve its full liberation at death.

Thus, as far as the destiny of the soul after death is concerned, there are two opposite paths. The first is the "path of the gods," also known as the "solar path" or Zeus's path, which leads to the bright dwelling of the immortals. This dwelling was variously represented as a height, heaven, or an island, from the Nordic Valhalla and Asgard to the Aztec-Inca "House of the Sun" that was reserved for kings, heroes, and nobles. The other path is that trodden by those who do not survive in a real way, and who slowly yet inexorably dissolve back into their original stocks, into the "totems" that unlike single individuals, never die; this is the life of Hades, of the "infernals," of Niflheim, of the chthonic deities.

This teaching is found in the Hindu tradition where the expressions deva-yāna and pitr-yāna signify "path of the gods," and "path of the ancestors" (in the sense of manes), respectively. It is also said: "These two paths, one bright and the other dark, are considered eternal in the universe. In the former, man goes out and then comes back; in the latter he keeps on returning." The first path "leading to Brahman," namely, to the unconditioned state, is analogically associated with fire, light, the day, and the six months of the solar ascent during the year; it leads to the region of thunderbolts, located beyond the "door of the sun." The second path, which is related to smoke, night, and the six months of the sun's descent leads to the moon, which is the symbol of the principle of change and becoming and which is manifested here as the principle regulating the cycle of finite beings who continuously come and go in many ephemeral incarnations of the ancestral forces.

According to an interesting symbolism, those who follow the lunar path become the food of the manes and are "sacrificed" again by them in the semen of new mortal births.

According to another significant symbol found in the Greek tradition, those who have not been initiated, that is to say, the majority of people, are condemned in Hades to do the Danaïdes' work; carrying water in amphorae filled with holes and pouring it into bottomless barrels, thus never being able to fill them up; this illustrates the insignificance of their ephemeral lives, which keep recurring over and over again, pointlessly. Another comparable Greek symbol is Ocnus, who plaited a rope on the Plains of Lethe. This rope was continually eaten by an ass. Ocnus

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symbolizes man's activity, while the ass traditionally embodies the "demonic" power; in Egypt the ass was associated with the snake of darkness and with Ammit, the "devourer of the dead."

In this context we again find the basic ideas concerning the "two natures" that I discussed in the first chapter. But here it is possible to penetrate deeper into the meaning of the existence in antiquity not only of two types of divinities, (the former Uranian and solar, the latter telluric and lunar), but also of the existence of two essentially distinct types (at times even opposed to each other) of rite and cult.

A civilization's degree of faithfulness to Tradition is determined by the degree of the predominance of cults and rituals of the first type over those of the second type. Likewise, the nature and the function of the rites proper to the world of "spiritual virility" is specified.

A characteristic of what today goes by the name of the "science of religions" is that whenever by sheer chance it finds the right key to solve a "mystery," it reaches the conclusion that this key is good to solve all mysteries. Thus, when some scholars learned about the idea of the totem, they began to see totems everywhere. The "totemic" interpretation was shamelessly applied to the forms found in great civilizations, since some scholars thought that the best explanation for them could be derived from earlier studies on primitive tribes. Last but not least, a sexual theory of the totem eventually came to be formulated.

I will not say that the shift from the totems of those primitive populations to a traditional regality was a historical development; at most, it was an evolution in an ideal sense. A regal or an aristocratic tradition arises wherever there is dominion over the totems and not dominion of the totems, and wherever the bond is inverted and the deep forces of the stock are given a superbiological orientation by a supernatural principle in the direction of an Olympian "victory" and immortality. To establish ambiguous promiscuities that make individuals more vulnerable to the powers on which they depend as natural beings, thus allowing the center of their being to fall deeper and deeper into the collective and into the prepersonal dimensions and to "placate" or to propitiate certain infernal influences, granting them their wish to become incarnated in the souls and in the world of men—this is the essence of an inferior cult that is only an extension of the way of being of those who have no cult and no rite at all. In other words, it is the characteristic of the extreme degeneration of higher traditional forms. To free human beings from the dominion of the totems; to strengthen them; to address them to the fulfillment of a spiritual form and a limit; and to bring them in an invisible way to the line of influences capable of creating a destiny of heroic and liberating immortality—this was the task of the aristocratic cult.

When human beings persevered in this cult, the fate of Hades was averted and the "way of the Mother" was barred. Once the divine rites were neglected, however, this destiny was reconfirmed and the power of the inferior nature became omnipotent again. In this way, the meaning of the abovementioned Oriental teaching is made manifest, namely, that those who neglect the rites cannot escape "hell," this word meaning both a way of being in this life and a destiny in the next. In its deepest sense, the duty to preserve, nourish, and develop the mystical fire (which was

considered to be the body of the god of the families, cities, and empires, as well as, according to a Vedic expression, the "custodian of immortality") without any interruption concealed the ritual promise to preserve, nourish, and develop the principle of a higher destiny and contact with the overworld that were created by the ancestor. In this way this fire is most intimately related to the fire, which especially in the Hindu and in the Greek view and, more generally speaking, in the Olympian-Aryan ritual of cremation, burns in the funeral pyre; this fire was the symbol of the power that consumes the last remains of the earthly nature of the deceased until it generates beyond it the "fulgurating form" of an immortal.

Bipartition of the Traditional Spirit

Asceticism

Having explained the spirit that animated the caste system, it is now necessary to discuss the path that is above the castes and is directed at implementing the realization of transcendence—in analogous terms to those of high initiation, yet outside the specific and rigorous structures characterizing it.

On the one hand, the pariah is a person without a caste, the one who has "lapsed" or who has eluded the "form" by being powerless before it, thus returning to the infernal world. The ascetic, on the other hand, is a being above the caste, one who becomes free from the form by renouncing the illusory center of human individuality; he turns toward the principle from which every "form" proceeds, not by faithfulness to his own nature and by participation in the hierarchy, but by a direct action. Therefore, as great as was the revulsion harboured by every caste toward the pariah in Aryan India, so, by contrast, was the veneration felt by everybody for a person who was above the castes. These beings, according to a Buddhist image, should not be expected to follow a human dharma, just as one who is trying to kindle a fire ultimately does not care what kind of wood is being employed, as long as it is capable of producing fire and light.

Asceticism occupies an ideal intermediary state between the plane of direct, Olympian, and initiatory regality and the plane of rite and of dharma. Asceticism also presents two features or qualifications that from a broader perspective may be considered as qualifications of the same traditional spirit. The first aspect of the ascetic path is action, understood as heroic action; the second aspect is asceticism in the technical sense of the word, especially with reference to the path of contemplation. Beyond complete traditional forms and in more recent times some civilizations have arisen that were inspired in different degrees by either one of these two poles. Later on we shall see what role the two aspects have played in the dynamism of historical forces, even on the plane that is related to the ethnic and racial factor. In order to grasp the spirit of an ascetical tradition at a pure state it is necessary to leave out of consideration the meanings that have been associated with the term asceticism in the world of Western religiosity. Action and knowledge are two fundamental human faculties; in both domains it is possible to accomplish an integration capable of removing human limitations. The asceticism of contemplation consists of

the integration of the knowing faculty (achieved through detachment from sensible reality) with the neutralization of individual rationalizing faculties and with the progressive stripping of the nucleus of consciousness, which thus becomes "free from conditionings" and subtracts itself from the limitation and from the necessity of any determination, whether real or virtual. Once all the dross and obstructions are removed (opus remotionis), participation in the overworld takes place in the form of a vision or an enlightenment. As the peak of the ascetical path, this point also represents at the same time the beginning of a truly continuous, progressive ascent that realizes states of being truly superior to the human condition. The essential ideals of the ascetical path are the universal as knowledge and knowledge as liberation.

The ascetical detachment typical of the contemplative path implies "renunciation." In this regard, it is necessary to prevent the misunderstanding occasioned by some inferior forms of asceticism. It is important to emphasize the different meanings that renunciation assumed in higher forms of ancient and Eastern asceticism on the one hand, and in most of Western and especially Christian asceticism on the other hand. In the latter, renunciation often assumed the character of a repression and of a "mortification"; the Christian ascetic becomes detached from the objects of desire not because he no longer has any desire, but in order to mortify himself and to "escape temptation." In the former, renunciation proceeds from a natural distaste for objects that are usually attractive and yearned for; this distaste is motivated by the fact that one directly desires—or better, wills—something the world of conditioned experience cannot grant. In this case, what leads to renunciation is the natural nobility of one's desire rather than an external intervention aimed at slowing down, mortifying, and inhibiting the faculty of desire in a vulgar nature. After all, the emotional phase, even in its purest and noblest forms, is only found at the introductory levels in higher forms of asceticism; in later stages, it is consumed by the intellectual fire and by the arid splendour of pure contemplation.

A typical example of contemplative asceticism is given by early Buddhism in its lack of "religious" features, its organization in a pure system of techniques, and in the spirit that animates it, which is so different from what anyone may think about asceticism. First of all, Buddhism does not know any "gods" in the religious sense of the word; the gods are believed to be powers who also need liberation, and thus the "Awakened One" is acknowledged to be superior to both men and gods. In the Buddhist canon it is written that an ascetic not only becomes free from human bonds, but from divine bonds as well. Secondly, moral norms, in the original forms of Buddhism, are purported to be mere instruments to be employed in the quest for the objective realization of superindividual states. Anything that belongs to the world of "believing," of "faith," or that is remotely associated with emotional experiences is shunned.

The fundamental principle of the method is "knowledge": to turn the knowledge of the ultimate nonidentity of the Self with anything "else" (whether it be the monistic All or the world of Brahma, theistically conceived) into a fire that progressively devours any irrational self-identification with anything that is conditioned. In conformity to the path, the final outcome, besides the negative designation (nirvāna = "cessation of restlessness"), is expressed in terms of

"knowledge," *bodhi*, which is knowledge in the eminent sense of superrational enlightenment or liberating knowledge, as in "waking up" from sleep, slumber, or a hallucination. It goes without saying that this is not the equivalent of the cessation of power or of anything resembling a dissolution. To dissolve ties is not to become dissolved but to become free. The image of the one who, once freed from all yokes, whether human or divine, is supremely autonomous and thus may go wherever he pleases, is found very frequently in the Buddhist canon together with all kinds of symbols of a virile and warrior type, and also with constant and explicit reference not so much to nonbeing but rather to something superior to both being and nonbeing. Buddha, as it is well known, belonged to an ancient stock of Aryan warrior nobility and his doctrine (purported to be the "dharma of the pure ones, inaccessible to an uninstructed, average person") is a very far cry from any mystical escapism. Buddha's doctrine is permeated by a sense of superiority, clarity, and an indomitable spirit, and Buddha himself is called "the fully Self-Awakened One," "the Lord."

The Buddhist renunciation is of a virile and aristocratic type and is animated by an inner strength; it is not dictated by need but is consciously willed, so that the person practicing it may overcome need and become reintegrated into a perfect life. It is understandable that when our contemporaries, who only know a life that is mixed with nonlife that in its restlessness presents the irrational traits of a "mania," hear mention of *nirvāna* (in reference to the condition experienced by the Awakened One), namely, of an extinction of mania corresponding to what the Germans call "more than living" (*mehr als Leben*) and to a superlife, they cannot help but equate *nirvāna* with "nothingness": for non-mania (*nir-vāna*) means nonlife, or nothingness. After all, it is only natural that the modern spirit has relegated the values cherished by higher asceticism to the things of the "past."

A Western example of pure contemplative asceticism is given by Neoplatonism. With the words, "The gods ought to come to me, not I to them," Plotinus indicated a fundamental aspect of aristocratic asceticism. Also, with the sayings, "It is to the gods, not to good men that we are to be made like," and, "Our concern, though, is not to be out of sin, but to be god," Plotinus has definitely overcome the limitations posed by morality, and has employed the method of inner simplification (*ἀπλόσις*) as a way to become free from all conditionings in that state of metaphysical simplicity from which the vision will eventually arise. By means of this vision—"having joined as it were center to center"—what occurs is the participation in that intelligible reality that compared to which any other reality may be characterized as more nonlife than life, with the sensible impressions appearing as dreams and the world of bodies as the place of radical powerlessness and of the inability to be.

Another example is given by the so-called Rhineland mysticism that was capable of reaching metaphysical peaks towering above and beyond Christian theism. Tauler's *Entwerdung* corresponds to Plotinus's *ἀπλόσις* and to the destruction of the element of "becoming" (or *samsāric* element) that Buddhism regarded as the condition necessary to achieve "awakening." The aristocratic view of contemplative asceticism reappears in the doctrine of Meister Eckhart.

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Like Buddha, Eckhart addressed the noble man and the "noble soul" whose metaphysical dignity is witnessed by the presence of a "strength," a "light," and a "fire" within it—in other words, of something before which even the deity conceived as a "person" (i.e., theistically) becomes something exterior. The method he employed consisted essentially of detachment from all things (Abegescheidenheit), a virtue that according to Eckhart is above love, humility, or mercifulness, as he explained in his sermon On Detachment.

The principle of "spiritual centrality" was affirmed: the true Self is God, God is our real center and we are external only to ourselves. Fear, hope, anguish, joy, and pain, or anything that may bring us out of ourselves, must be allowed to seep into us. An action dictated by desire, even when its goal is the kingdom of heaven itself, eternal life, or the beatific vision, must not be undertaken. The path suggested by Eckhart leads from the outside to the inside, beyond everything that is mere "image"; beyond things and what represents the quality of a thing (Dingheit); beyond forms and the quality of form (Formlichkeit); beyond essences and essentiality. From the gradual extinction of all images and forms, and eventually of one's own thoughts, will, and knowledge, what arises is a transformed and supernatural knowledge that is carried beyond all forms (überformt). Thus one reaches a peak in respect to which "God" himself (always according to his theistic view) appears as something ephemeral, that is, as a transcendent and uncreated peak of the Self without which "God" himself could not exist. All the typical images of the religious consciousness are swallowed up by a reality that is an absolute, pure possession, and that in its simplicity cannot help but to appear terrifying to any finite being. Once again we find a solar symbol: before this barren and absolute substance, "God" appears as the moon next to the sun.

The divine light in comparison with the radiance of this substance pales, just as the sun's light outshines the moon's.

After this brief mention of the meaning of contemplative asceticism, it is necessary to say something about the other path, namely, the path of action.

While in contemplative asceticism we find a mostly inner process in which the theme of detachment and the direct orientation toward transcendence are predominant, in the second case we have an immanent process aimed at awakening the deepest forces of the human being and at bringing them to the limit, thus causing a superlife to spring from life itself in a context of absolute intensity; this is the heroic life according to the sacred meaning often displayed in the traditional Eastern and Western worlds. The nature of such a realization causes it to present simultaneously an outer and an inner, a visible and an invisible aspect; conversely, pure contemplative asceticism may also lie entirely in a domain that is not connected to the external world by something tangible.

When the two poles of the ascetical path are not separated and neither one becomes the "dominating" trait of a particular type of civilization, but on the contrary, both poles are present and joined together, then the ascetical element feeds in an invisible way the forces of "centrality"

and "stability" of a traditional organism, while the heroic element enjoys a greater relationship with the dynamism and the force animating its structures.

In relation to the path of action, in the next two chapters I will discuss the doctrine of the holy war and the role played by games in antiquity. I will further develop the topic of heroic action given the interest it should evoke in Western man who, by virtue of his own nature, is more inclined to act than to contemplate.

The Greater and the Lesser Holy War

Considering that in the traditional view of the world every reality was a symbol and every action a ritual, the same was true in the case of war; since war could take on a sacred character, "holy war" and "the path to God" became one and the same thing. In more or less explicit forms, this concept is found in many traditions: a religious aspect and a transcendent intent were often associated with the bloody and military deeds of traditional humanity.

Livy relates that the Samnite warriors looked like initiates; 1 similarly, among savage populations the magical and the warrior elements are often intermingled. In ancient Mexico the bestowal of the title of commander (tecuhtli) was subordinated to the successful outcome of difficult trials of an initiatory type; also, until recent times the Japanese warrior nobility (the samurai) was to a large degree inspired by the doctrines and asceticism of Zen, an esoteric form of Buddhism.

The ancient worldview and myths, in which the theme of antagonism repeatedly occurred, automatically propelled the elevation of the art of war to a spiritual plane. This was the case of the Persian-Aryan tradition and also of the Hellenic world, which often saw in material warfare the reflection of a perennial cosmic struggle between the spiritual Olympian-Uranian element of the cosmos on the one hand, and the Titanic, demonic-feminine unrestrained elements of chaos on the other hand. This interpretation is possible especially in those instances where war was associated with the idea of the empire, and also because of the transcendent meaning this concept evoked; it was then translated into a very powerful idea. The symbolism of Heracles' labors, he being the hero fighting on the side of the Olympian forces, was applied to as late a figure as Frederick I of Hohenstaufen.

Special views concerning one's fate in the afterlife introduce us to the inner meanings of warrior asceticism. According to the Aztec and Nahua races, the highest seat of immortality—the "House of the Sun" or the "House of Huitzilopochtli"—was reserved not only for sovereigns but for heroes as well; as far as ordinary people were concerned, they were believed to slowly fade away in a place analogous to the Hellenic Hades. The Nordic-Aryan mythology conceived Valhalla as the seat of heavenly immortality reserved for the heroes fallen on the battlefield, in addition to nobles and free men of divine origin. This seat was related to the symbolism of "heights" (as Glitnirbjorg, the "resplendent mountain," or Hmninbjorg, the "heavenly mountain," the highest

divine mountain on whose peaks an eternal brightness shines beyond the clouds), and was often identified with Asgard, namely, with the Aesir's seat located in the Middle Land (Mitgard); the Lord of this seat was Odin-Wotan, the Nordic god of war and victory. According to a particular myth, Odin was the king who with his sacrifice showed to the heroes the path that leads to the divine dwellings where they will live forever and be transformed into his "sons." Thus, according to the Nordic races, no sacrifice or cult was more cherished by the supreme god and thought to bear more supernatural fruits than the one celebrated by the hero who falls on the battlefield; from a declaration of war to its bloody conclusion, the religious element permeated the Germanic hosts and inspired the individual warrior as well. Moreover, in these traditions we find the idea that by means of a heroic death the warrior shifted from the plane of the material, earthly war to the plane of struggle of a transcendent and universal character. The hosts of heroes were believed to constitute the so-called Wildes Heer, the mounted stormtroopers Jed by Odin who take off from the peak of Mount Valhalla and then return to rest on it. In the higher forms of this tradition, the host of the dead heroes selected by the Valkyrie for Odin, with whom the Wildes Heer eventually became identified, was the army the god needed in order to fight against the ragna-rokkr, the "twilight of the gods" that has been approaching for a very long time.

It is written: "There is a very large number of dead heroes in Valhalla, and many more have yet to come, and yet they will seem too few when the wolf comes."

What has been said so far concerns the transformation of the war into a "holy war." Now I wish to add some specific references found in other traditions.

In the Islamic tradition a distinction is made between two holy wars, the "greater holy war" (el-jihadul-akbar) and the "lesser holy war" (el-jihadul- ashgar). This distinction originated from a saying (hadith) of the Prophet, who on the way back from a military expedition said: "You have returned from a lesser holy war to the greater holy war." The greater holy war is of an inner and spiritual nature; the other is the material war waged externally against an enemy population with the particular intent of bringing "infidel" populations under the rule of "God's Law" (al-Islam). The relationship between the "greater" and the "lesser holy war," however, mirrors the relationship between the soul and the body; in order to understand the heroic asceticism or "path of action," it is necessary to recognize the situation in which the two paths merge, "the lesser holy war" becoming the means through which "a greater holy war" is carried out, and vice versa: the "little holy war," or the external one, becomes almost a ritual action that expresses and gives witness to the reality of the first. Originally, orthodox Islam conceived a unitary form of asceticism: that which is connected to the jihad or "holy war."

The "greater holy war" is man's struggle against the enemies he carries within. More exactly, it is the struggle of man's higher principle against everything that is merely human in him, against his inferior nature and against chaotic impulses and all sorts of material attachments.

This is expressly outlined in a text of Aryan warrior wisdom: "Know Him therefore who is above reason; and let his peace give thee peace. Be a warrior and kill desire, the powerful enemy of the

soul."

The "enemy" who resists us and the "infidel" within ourselves must be subdued and put in chains. This enemy is the animalistic yearning and instinct, the disorganized multiplicity of impulses, the limitations imposed on us by a fictitious self, and thus also fear, weakness, and uncertainty; this subduing of the enemy is the only way to achieve inner liberation or the rebirth in a state of a deeper inner unity and "peace" in the esoteric and triumphal sense of the word.

In the world of traditional warrior asceticism the "lesser holy war," namely, the external war, is indicated and even prescribed as the means to wage this "greater holy war"; thus in Islam the expressions "holy war" (jihad) and "Allah's way" are often used interchangeably. In this order of ideas action exercises the rigorous function and task of a sacrificial and purifying ritual. The external vicissitudes experienced during a military campaign cause the inner "enemy" to emerge and to put up a fierce resistance and a good fight in the form of the animalistic instincts of self-preservation, fear, inertia, compassion, or other passions; those who engage in battles must overcome these feelings by the time they enter the battlefield if they wish to win and to defeat the outer enemy or the "infidel."

Obviously the spiritual orientation and the "right intention" (niya), that is, the one toward transcendence (the symbols employed to refer to transcendence are "heaven," "paradise," "Allah's gardens" and so on), are presupposed as the foundations of jihad, lest war lose its sacred character and degenerate into a wild affair in which true heroism is replaced with reckless abandonment and what counts are the unleashed impulses of the animalistic nature.

It is written in the Koran: "Let those who would exchange the life of this world for the hereafter fight for the cause of Allah; whether they die or conquer, We shall richly reward them." The presupposition according to which it is prescribed, "When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads, and when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly"; or, "Do not falter or sue for peace when you have gained the upper hand," is that "the life of this world is but a sport and a pastime" and that "whoever is ungenerous to this cause is ungenerous to himself."

These statements should be interpreted along the lines of the evangelical saying: "Whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt.

16:25). This is confirmed by yet another Koranic passage: "Why is it that when it is said to you: 'March in the cause of Allah,' you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come?"

"Say: 'Are you waiting for anything to befall us except victory or martyrdom?'" Another passage is relevant as well: "Fighting is obligatory for you, as much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not." This passage should also be connected with the following one: They were content to be

with those who stayed behind: a seal was set upon their hearts, leaving them bereft of understanding. But the Apostle and the men who shared his faith fought with their goods and their persons. These shall be rewarded with good things. They shall surely prosper. Allah has prepared for them gardens watered by running streams, in which they shall abide forever. That is the supreme triumph.

This place of "rest" (paradise) symbolizes the superindividual states of being, the realization of which is not confined to the postmortem alone, as the following passage indicates: "As for those who are slain in the cause of Allah, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and ennable their state; He will admit them to the Paradise He has made known to them."

In the instance of real death in battle, we find the equivalent of the mors triumphalis found in classical traditions. Those who have experienced the "greater holy war" during the "lesser holy war," have awakened a power that most likely will help them overcome the crisis of death; this power, having already liberated them from the "enemy" and from the "infidel," will help them avoid the fate of Hades. This is why in classical antiquity the hope of the deceased and the piety of his relatives often caused figures of heroes and of victors to be inscribed on the tombstones. It is possible, however, to go through death and conquer, as well as achieve, the superlife and to ascend to the "heavenly realm" while being alive.

The Islamic formulation of the heroic doctrine corresponds to that formulated in the Bhagavadgītā, in which the same meanings are expressed in a purer way. The doctrine of liberation through pure action, which is expounded in this text, is declared to be "solar" in origin and is believed to have been communicated by the founder of the present cycle to dynasties of sacred kings rather than to priests (brāhmaṇa).

The piety that keeps the warrior Arjuna from going to battle against his enemies, since he recognizes among them his own relatives and teachers, is characterized by the Bhagavadgītā as "lifeless dejection." The text adds: "Strong men do not know despair, for that wins neither heaven nor earth." The promise is the same: "In death thy glory in heaven, in victory thy glory on earth. Arise therefore, with thy soul ready to fight."

The inner attitude—the equivalent of the Islamic niya—that is capable of transforming the "lesser war" into a "greater holy war" is described in clear terms: "Offer to me all thy works and rest thy mind on the Supreme. Be free from vain hopes and selfish thoughts, and with inner peace fight thou thy fight."

The purity of this type of action, which must be willed for its own sake, is also celebrated in clear terms: "Prepare for war with peace in thy soul. Be in peace in pleasure and pain, in gain and in loss, in victory or in the loss of a battle. In this peace there is no sin." In other words: you will not stray from the supernatural direction by fulfilling your dharma as a warrior.

The relationship between war and "the path to God" is present in the Gītā too, though the

metaphysical rather than the ethical aspect is more heavily stressed: the warrior reproduces somewhat the deity's transcendence. The teaching Kṛṣṇa imparts to Arjuna concerns first of all the distinction between what is pure and undying and that which, as a human and naturalistic element, only appears to exist:

The unreal never is: the Real never is not. This truth indeed has been seen by those who can see the true. Interwoven in his creation, the Spirit is beyond destruction. No one can bring to an end the Spirit which is everlasting....If any man thinks he slays, and if another thinks he is slain, neither knows the ways of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill: the Eternal in man cannot die....He does not die when the body dies ... these bodies have an end in their time; but he remains immeasurable, immortal. Therefore, great warrior, carry on thy fight.

The consciousness of the unreality of what can be lost or caused to be lost as ephemeral life and as mortal body (the equivalent of the Islamic view that this life is just a sport and a pastime) is associated with the knowledge of that aspect of the divine according to which this aspect is an absolute power before which every conditioned existence appears as a negation; this power becomes naked and dazzles in a terrible theophany precisely in the act of destruction, in the act that "negates the negation," in the whirlwind that sweeps away every finite life, either destroying it or making it arise again in a transhuman state.

In order to free Arjuna from doubt and from the "soft bond of the soul," Kṛṣṇa says:

I am the life of all living beings, and the austere life of those who train their souls. And I am from everlasting the seed of eternal life. I am the intelligence of the intelligent. I am the beauty of the beautiful. I am the power of those who are strong, when this power is free from passions and selfish desires. I am desire when this is pure, when this desire is not against righteousness.

In the end, having abandoned all personifications, Kṛṣṇa manifests himself in the "wonderful and fearful form before which the three worlds tremble," "vast, reaching the sky, burning with many colors, with wide open mouths, with vast flaming eyes."

Finite beings—as lamps outshone by a much greater source of light, or as circuits pervaded by a much greater current—give way, disintegrate, melt, because in their midst there is now a power transcending their form, that wills something infinitely greater than anything that as individual agents they may will by themselves. This is why finite beings "become," being transformed and going from the manifested into the unmanifested, from the material to the immaterial. On this basis the power capable of producing the heroic realization is clearly defined. The values are overturned: death becomes a witness to life, and the destructive power of time displays the indomitable nature hidden inside what is subject to time and death. Hence the meaning of these words uttered by Arjuna at the moment in which he experiences the deity as pure transcendence: As roaring torrents of waters rush forward into the ocean, so do these heroes of our mortal world rush into thy flaming mouths. And as moths swiftly rushing enter a burning flame and die, so all these men rush to thy fire, rush fast to their own destruction.

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Krsna also added:

I am all-powerful Time which destroys all things, and I have come here to slay these men. Even if thou dost not fight, all the warriors facing thee shall die. Arise therefore! Win thy glory, conquer thy enemies, and enjoy thy kingdom. Through fate of their own karma I have doomed them to die: be thou merely the means of my work ...tremble not, fight and slay them. Thou shalt conquer thy enemies in battle.

In this way we find again the identification of war with "the path to God." The warrior evokes in himself the transcendent power of destruction; he takes it on, becomes transfigured in it and free, thus breaking loose from all human bonds.

Life is like a bow and the soul like an arrow, the target being aimed at is the Supreme Spirit; another text of the same Hindu tradition says that what matters is to become united with the Supreme, as an arrow is united with its target.

This is the metaphysical justification of war and the transformation of the lesser into the greater holy war. It also sheds further light on the meaning of the traditions concerning the transformation, in the course of the battle, of a warrior or a king into a god. According to an Egyptian tradition, Ramses Merianun was transformed in the battlefield into the god Amon, and said: "I am like Baal in his own time"; when his enemies recognized him in the mêlée, they cried out: "This is not a man; he is Satkhu, the Great Warrior; he is Baal in the flesh." In this context Baal is the equivalent of the Vedic Śiva and Indra; of the solar god TiuzTyr, who is represented by a sword and by the rune Y, which is the ideogram of resurrection ("a man with raised arms"); and of Odin-Wotan, the god of battles and of victories. It should not be forgotten that both Indra and Wotan are conceived of as gods of order and as the overseers of the world's course (Indra is called "the one who stems the tides"; as the god of the day and of clear skies he also exhibits Olympian traits).

What we find in these examples is the general theme of war being justified as a reflection of the transcendent war waged by "form" against chaos and the forces of the inferior nature that accompany it.

Further on, I will discuss the classical Western forms of the "path of action." As far as the Western doctrine of the "holy war" is concerned, I will refer here only to the Crusades. The fact that during the Crusades men who fought the war intensely and experienced it according to the same spiritual meaning were found on both sides demonstrates the true unity between people who shared the same traditional spirit; a unity that can be preserved not only through differences of opinion but also through the most dramatic contrasts. In their rising up in arms against each other, Islam and Christianity gave witness to the unity of the traditional spirit.

The historical context in which the Crusades took place abounds with elements capable of conferring upon them a potential symbolical and spiritual meaning. The conquest of the "Holy Land" located "beyond the sea" in reality had many more connections with ancient traditions

than it was first thought; according to these traditions, "in the ancient East, where the sun rises, there lies the happy region of the Aesir and in it, the city of Ayard, where there is no death and where journeyers enjoy a heavenly peace and eternal life." Moreover, the struggle against Islam, by virtue of its nature, shared from the beginning several common traits with asceticism: "It was not a matter of fighting for earthly kingdoms, but for the kingdom of God: the Crusades were not a human, but a divine affair; consequently they should not be considered like all other human events."

The holy war was at that time the equivalent of a spiritual war and of "a cleansing that is almost a purgatorial fire that one experiences before death," to use an expression found in a chronicle of those times. Popes and preachers compared those who died in the Crusades to "gold tested three times and purified seven times in the furnace"; the fallen warriors were believed to find grace with the supreme Lord. In his *De laude novae militiae*, Saint Bernard wrote: Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. What a glory it is for you to emerge from the battle crowned with victory! But what a greater glory it is to win on the battlefield an immortal crown....What a truly blessed condition, when one can wait for death without any fear, yearning for it and welcoming it with a strong spirit!

The crusader was promised a share in the "absolute glory" and "rest" in paradise (in the coarse language of the time: *conquerre lit en paradis*), which is the same kind of supernatural rest mentioned in the Koran.

Likewise, Jerusalem, the military objective of the Crusades, appeared in the double aspect of an earthly and of a heavenly city, and thus the Crusade became the equivalent in terms of heroic tradition of a "ritual," a pilgrimage, and the "passion" of the *via crucis*. Moreover, those who belonged to the orders that contributed the most to the Crusades—such as the Knights Templar and the Knights of Saint John—were men who, like the Christian monks or ascetics, learned to despise the vanity of this life; these orders were the natural retirement place for those warriors who were weary of the world, who had seen and experienced just about everything, and who had directed their spiritual quest toward something higher. The teaching that *vita est militia super terram* was instilled in these knights in an integral, inner, and outer fashion. Through prayers they readied themselves to fight and to move against the enemy. Their matins was the trumpet; their hair shirts, the armour they rarely took off; their fortresses, the monasteries; the trophies taken from the infidels, the relics and the images of saints. A similar kind of asceticism paved the way for that spiritual realization that was also related to the secret dimension of chivalry.

The military defeats the crusaders suffered, after an initial surprise and perplexity, helped to purify the Crusades from any residue of materialism and to focus on the inner rather than on the outer dimension, on the spiritual rather than on the temporal element. By comparing the unfortunate outcome of a Crusade with that of an unnoticed virtue, which is appreciated and rewarded only in the next life, people learned to see something superior to both winning and

losing and to put all their values in the ritual and "sacrificial" aspect of an action as an end in itself, which is performed independently from the visible earthly results as an oblation aimed at deriving the life-giving "absolute glory" from the sacrifice of the human element.

Therefore, in the Crusades we find the recurrence of the main meanings of expressions such as: "Paradise lies under the shade of the swords," and "The blood of the heroes is closer to God than the ink of the philosophers and the prayers of the faithful," as well as the view of the seat of immortality as the "island of heroes," (or Valhalla) and as the "court of heroes." What occurs again is the same spirit that animated the warrior in Zoroastrian dualism. By virtue of this spirit, the followers of Mithras assimilated the exercise of their cult to the military profession; the neophytes swore by an oath (sacramentum) similar to that required of the recruits in the army; and once a man joined the ranks of the initiates, he became part of the "sacred militia of the invincible god of light." Moreover, it must be emphasized that during the Crusades the realization of universality and of supernationalism through asceticism was eventually achieved. Leaders and nobles from all lands converged into the same sacred enterprise, above and beyond their particular interests and political divisions, to forge a European solidarity informed by the same ecumenical ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. The main strength of the Crusades, was supplied by chivalry, which as I have already remarked, was a supernational institution whose members had no homeland because they would go anywhere they could to fight for those principles to which they swore unconditional faithfulness. Since Pope Urban II referred to chivalry as the community of those who "show up everywhere a conflict erupts, in order to spread the terror that their weapons evoke in defense of honor and justice," he expected chivalry to answer the call to a holy war. Thus, here too we find a convergence of the inner and outer dimensions; in the holy war the individual was afforded the experience of a meta-individual action. Likewise, the teaming up of warriors for a purpose higher than their own race, national interests, or territorial and political concerns was an external expression of the overcoming of all particularities, already an ideal of the Holy Roman Empire.

In reality, if the universality connected with the asceticism of the pure spiritual authority is the condition for an invisible traditional unity that exists over and above any political division within the body of a unitary civilization informed by the cosmic and by the eternal (in respect of which everything that is pathos and human inclination disappears and the dimension of the spirit presents the same characteristic of purity and power as the great forces of nature); and when this universality is added to "universality as action"—then we arrive at the supreme ideal of the empire, an ideal whose unity is both visible and invisible, material and political, as well as spiritual. Heroic asceticism and the untameability of the warrior vocation strengthened by a supernatural direction are the necessary instruments that allow the inner unity to be analogically reflected in the outer unity, namely, in the social body represented by many peoples that are organized and unified by the same one great conquering stock.

Moreover, those who love to contrast the past with our recent times should consider what modern civilization has brought us to in terms of war. A change of level has occurred; from the

warrior who fights for the honor and for the right of his lord, society has shifted to the type of the mere "soldier" that is found in association with the removal of all transcendent or even religious elements in the idea of fighting.

To fight on "the path to God" has been characterized as "medieval" fanaticism; conversely, it has been characterized as a most sacred cause to fight for "patriotic" and "nationalistic" ideals and for other myths that in our contemporary era have eventually been unmasked and shown to be the instruments of irrational, materialistic, and destructive forces. It has gradually become possible to see that when "country" was mentioned, this rallying cry often concealed the plans of annexation and oppression and the interests of monopolistic industries; all talk of "heroism" was done by those who accompanied soldiers to the train stations. Soldiers went to the front to experience war as something else, namely, as a crisis that all too often did not turn out to be an authentic and heroic transfiguration of the personality, but rather the regression of the individual to a plane of savage instincts, "reflexes," and reactions that retain very little of the human by virtue of being below and not above humanity.

The era of nationalism has known a worthy surrogate for the two great traditional culminations that are the universality of spiritual authority and heroic universality: I am referring to imperialism. Although in society the act of one who takes over somebody else's goods by force, whether out of envy or out of need, is considered to be reprehensible, a similar behavior in the relationships between nations has been considered as a natural and legitimate thing; it has consecrated the notion of fighting; and it has constituted the foundation of the "imperialistic" ideal. It was thought that a poor nation "lacking living space" has every right, if not the duty, to take over the goods and the lands of other people.

In some instances the conditions leading to expansion and to "imperialist conquest" have been fabricated ad hoc. A typical example has been the pursuit of demographical growth, inspired by the password "There is power in numbers." Another example, more widespread and denoting a lower mentality since it is exclusively controlled by economic and financial factors, is that of overproduction. Once a nation experiences an excess of production and the demographical or commercial "need for space," it desperately requires an outlet.

When the outlet of a "cold war" or diplomatic intrigues are no longer sufficient, what ensues are military expeditions that in my view rank much lower than what the barbaric invasions of the past may have represented. Such an upheaval, which has recently assumed global proportions, is accompanied by hypocritical rhetoric. The great ideas of "humanity," "democracy," and "the right of a people to self-determination," have been mobilized. From an external point of view, not only is the idea of "holy war" considered "outdated," but also the understanding of it that people of honour had developed; the heroic ideal has now been lowered to the figure of the policeman because the new "crusades" have not been able to find a better flag to rally around than that of the "struggle against the aggressor." From an inner point of view, beyond all this rhetoric, what proved to be decisive was the brute, cynical will to power of obscure, international, capitalist, and collectivist powers. At the same time "science" has promoted an extreme mechanization and

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technologization of war, so much so that today war is not a matter of man against man but of machines against man. Rational systems of mass extermination are being employed (through indiscriminate air raids, atomic weapons, and chemical warfare) that leave no hope and no way out; such systems could once have been devised only to exterminate germs and insects. In contrast to "medieval superstitions" that refer to a "holy war," what our contemporaries consider sacred and worthy of the actual "progress of civilization" is the fact that millions of human beings, taken away en masse from their occupations and vocations (which are totally alien to the military vocation), and literally turned into what military jargon refers to as "cannon fodder," will die in such events.

The End of the Cycle

Russia

In the Bolshevik revolution there are some traits worth examining. The revolution had very few of the romantic, stormy, chaotic, and irrational overtones that characterized other revolutions, especially the French one; on the contrary, it was intelligently planned and well executed. Lenin himself, from beginning to end, studied the problem of proletarian revolution like a mathematician dealing with a complex calculus problem by analyzing it in a detached and lucid way in all of its details. He was quoted as saying: "Martyrs and heroes are not necessary to the cause of the revolution; what the revolution needs is sound logic and an iron hand. Our task is not to lower the revolution to the level of the amateur, but to transform the amateur into a revolutionary." The counterpart of this view was Trotsky's activity, which made of the uprising and of the coup d'état not so much a problem of the masses and of the people, but rather a technique requiring the employment of specialized and well-directed teams.

In the leaders of the Bolshevik revolution it is possible to detect a ruthless ideological coherence. They were absolutely indifferent to the practical consequences and the countless calamities that derived from the application of abstract principles; to them "man" as such did not exist. It is almost as if in Bolshevism elemental forces became incarnated in a group of men who coupled the fierce concentration typical of a fanatic with the exact logic, method, and focus on the most effective means typical of a technician.

It was only in a second phase, which these leaders gave rise to and largely maintained within preestablished limits, that the uprising of the masses inhabiting the ancient Russian empire, and the regime of terror aimed at frantically extirpating what was connected to the ruling classes, eventually occurred.

Another characteristic trait was that while previous revolutions almost always escaped from the control of those who had started them and ended up devouring their "children," this happened only to a small degree in Russia, where a continuity of power and terror was firmly established.

Even though the logic of the red revolution did not hesitate to eliminate or remove those Bolsheviks who dared to venture outside the orthodox trajectory, and even though it had no regard for individuals and no scruples about the means to be employed for these removals, still, at the centre of the revolution there were never relevant crises or oscillations. This is indeed a characteristic as well as sinister trait; it foreshadows an era in which the forces of darkness will no longer work behind the scenes but come out into the open, having found their most suitable incarnation in beings in whom daemonism teams up with a lucid intellect, a method, and a strong will to power. A phenomenon of this kind is one of the most salient characteristics of the terminal point of every cycle.

As far as the communist idea is concerned, anybody who forgets that there are two truths in communism is likely to be deceived. The first "esoteric" truth has a dogmatic and immutable character; it corresponds to the basic tenets of the revolution and is formulated in the writings and in the directives of the early Bolshevik period. The second is a changeable and "realistic" truth, which is forged case by case, often in apparent contrast with the first truth, and characterized by eventual compromises with the ideas of the "bourgeois" world (e.g., the patriotic idea, mitigation in the collectivization of private property, the Slavic myth, and so on). The varieties of this second truth are usually set aside as soon as they have achieved their tactical objective; they are mere instruments at the service of the first truth. Therefore, those who would fall into this trap and believe that Bolshevism is a thing of the past, that it has evolved and that it is going to take on normal forms of government and international relations, are indeed extremely naive.

However, one should not be deceived about the first truth either; the Marxist economic myth is not its primary element. The primary element is the disavowal of every spiritual and transcendent value; the philosophy and the sociology of historical materialism are just expressions of this disavowal and derive from it, not the other way around, and the corresponding communist praxis is but one of the many methods employed systematically to carry it out. Thus, there is an important consequence that can be arrived at by following this path all the way to the end and that is the integration, or better, the disintegration of the single individual into the so-called collective, which rules supreme. In the communist world an important goal is the elimination in man of everything that has the value of autonomous personality and of all that may represent an interest unrelated to the needs of the collectivity. More specifically, the mechanization, disintellectualization, and rationalization of every activity, on every plane, are the means employed to this end, rather than being, as in the last European civilization, the much deplored and passively suffered consequences of fatal processes. Once every horizon is reduced to that of the economy, the machine becomes the centre of a new messianic promise and rationalization appears as one of the ways to eliminate the "residues" and the "individualistic rough edges" inherited from the "bourgeois era."

In the USSR, the abolition of private property and enterprise, which exists as a basic idea in the core doctrines of communism beyond various contingent accommodations, represents only an

episode and the means to an end. The goal is the realization of collective man and radical materialism in every domain and with an obvious disproportion with regard to anything that may be deduced from any mere economic myth. It is typical of the communist system to regard the "I," the "soul," and the notion of "mine" as bourgeois illusions and prejudices, fixed ideas, and the principles of all evil and disorder from which an adequate, realistic culture and pedagogy must free the man living in the new Marxist Leninist civilization.

This is how a radical elimination of all the individualistic, libertarian, humanist, and romantic falsehoods of the phase I have called "Western unrealism," is achieved. There is a well-known saying by Zinoviev:

"In every intellectual I see an enemy of the Soviet power." The will to turn art into art for the use of the masses, to stop art from doing "psychology" and from busying itself with the private concerns of single individuals, and to prevent art from delighting the parasitic higher classes and being an individualistic production is also well-known. The goal is rather to depersonalize art and transform it into "a powerful hammer spurring on the working class to action." That science may prescind itself from politics—that is, from the communist idea as a formative power—and be "objective" is refuted by communist authorities who see in this a dangerous "counterrevolutionary" deviation. An example of this mentality was the case of Vasiliev and the other biologists who were sent to Siberia because the genetic theory that they upheld, which consisted in acknowledging the factors of "heredity" and of "innate disposition" and in viewing man as other than an amorphous substance that takes shape only through the determining action of the environment, as Marxism would have it, did not correspond to the central idea of communism. The most radical theories of evolutionary materialism and sociological scientism found in Western thought are assumed by communism and turned into dogma and into the "official view of the state," the results being the brainwashing of the new generations and the contribution to the diffusion of a specific mentality. Enough is known about the antireligious campaign waged in the USSR, where it does not have the character of mere atheism, but rather of a real counterreligion; the latter betrays the true essence of Bolshevism mentioned above, which thus organizes the most apt means to eliminate the great disease of Western man, namely, that "faith" and need to "believe" that became his surrogates once the contact with the superworld was lost. An "education of feelings" in a similar direction is also contemplated so that the complications of the "bourgeois man," sentimentalism, and the obsession with eroticism and the passions may once and for all be eliminated. After the social classes have been leveled, and considering that only the articulations imposed by technocracy and the totalitarian apparatus are respected, even the sexes are levelled; the complete equality of women with men is sanctioned in every domain since an ideal of communism is to eliminate the differences between men and women, who are henceforth to be considered as "comrades." Thus, even the family is looked down upon, not only according to what it represented in the "age of the heroic right," but also in the residues proper to the bourgeois period. The so-called ZAGS ("registry offices for documents

of civil status") represented a characteristic change in this regard.

Anyway, it is well-known that in the USSR education is totally in the hands of the state, so that the child may learn to prefer the "collective" life to family life.

In the first constitution of the USSR a foreigner was automatically regarded as a member of the Union of the Soviets if he was a proletarian worker, whereas a Russian, if he was not a proletarian worker, was excluded from this union, denaturalized, and regarded as a pariah lacking a juridical personality.

According to strict communist orthodoxy, Russia was simply the country in which the world revolution of the Fourth Estate triumphed and was first organized in order to expand further. In addition to a mysticism of the collectivity, the Russian people have traditionally been characterized by a confused messianic impulse regarding themselves as a God-carrying people predestined to a work of universal redemption. All this was developed in an inverted form and updated in Marxist terms: God was transformed into the materialized and collectivized man, and the "God-carrying people" became the one attempting to impose its civilization on this earth through any available means. The ensuing mitigation of the extremist version of this thesis, exemplified by the stigmatization of Trotskyism, did not prevent the USSR from thinking it had the right and even the duty to intervene anywhere in the world to support the cause of communism.

From a historical point of view, during the Stalinist phase the myth of the "revolution" in the older sense of the word, which was always associated with chaos and disorder, is already a thing of the past; a new form of social order and unity is pursued through totalitarianism. Society becomes a machine in which there is only one engine, the communist state. Man is just a lever or cog in this machine for which the value of human life is null and any infamy is allowed, and as soon as man opposes it he is immediately swept away and broken by its gears.

Matter and spirit are enrolled in a common effort, and thus the USSR appears as a bloc that does not leave anything outside itself; a bloc that is simultaneously state, trust, and church, as well as a political, ideological, and economical industrial system. This is the ideal of the superstate as the sinister inversion of the traditional organic ideal.

Generally speaking, in the Soviet communist ideal there are aspects in which some sort of peculiar asceticism or catharsis is at work to attain the radical overcoming of the individualistic and humanistic element and the return to the principles of absolute reality and impersonality; and yet this overcoming is upside down, in other words, it is not directed upwards but downwards; not toward the superhuman, but toward the subpersonal; not toward organismism, but toward mechanism; not toward spiritual liberation, but toward total social enslavement.

For practical purposes it does not really matter that the primitivism of the great heteroclitic mass that comprises the USSR, in which all the racially superior elements have been eliminated through mass purges, may postpone to an indefinite future the effective formation of the "new

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man," and the "Soviet man." A direction has been imparted. The terminal myth of the world of the Fourth Estate has taken a decisive form and one of the greatest concentrations of power in the world is at its service; this power is the headquarters of all organized actions, whether covert or open, of the instigation of the international masses and of the colored peoples.

America

Although Bolshevism, according to Lenin's words, saw the Roman and Germanic world as the "greatest obstacle to the advent of the new man," and although, by taking advantage of the blinding of the democratic nations that willed a "crusade" against the powers of the Axis, it has been successful in eliminating that world as far as the direction of European destiny is concerned, as an ideology it has regarded America as some kind of promised land. With the demise of the old gods, the consequence of the exaltation of the technical and mechanical ideal was a kind of "cult of America." "The revolutionary storm of Soviet Russia must join the pace of American life," and, "The task of the new proletarian Russia is to intensify the mechanization already at work in America and to extend it to every domain," have been the official directives. Thus, Gasteff proclaimed "super-Americanism" and the poet Mayakovskielebrated Chicago, the "electro-dynamo-mechanical metropolis," with his collectivist hymn.

Obviously here the hated America, regarded as the bulwark of "capitalist imperialism," faded into the background while America as the civilization of the machine, quantity, and technocracy came into the foreground. References to congeniality, far from being extrinsic, may be confirmed in the elements taken from several other domains.

What and how many the divergences are between Russia and America in an ethnic, historical, and temperamental context is well-known and does not require any further illustrations. These divergences, however, are powerless before a fundamental fact; parts of an "ideal" that in Bolshevism either does not exist as such or is imposed with crude means have been realized in America through an almost spontaneous process, so much so as to acquire a natural and evident character. Thus, in a context much wider than he would have ever imagined, Engels' prophecy has been fulfilled, namely, that the world of capitalism would open the way for the Fourth Estate.

America too, in the essential way it views life and the world, has created a "civilization" that represents the exact contradiction of the ancient European tradition. It has introduced the religion of praxis and productivity; it has put the quest for profit, great industrial production, and mechanical, visible, and quantitative achievements over and above any other interest. It has generated a soulless greatness of a purely technological and collective nature, lacking any background of transcendence, inner light, and true spirituality. America has also put the view in

which man is considered in terms of quality and personality within an organic system in opposition with that view in which man becomes a mere instrument of production and material productivity within a conformist social conglomerate.

While in the formation process of the Soviet communist mentality the mass- man who lived mystically in the subsoil of the Slavic race has had a relevant role (the only modern feature is the context in which it can carry out its rational incarnation within an omnipotent political structure), in America this phenomenon derives from an inflexible determinism by virtue of which man, in the act of detaching himself from the spiritual dimension and in pursuing a merely temporal greatness, and having overcome all individualist illusions, ceases to belong to himself and becomes a dependent part of an entity that eventually he can no longer control and that conditions him in multiple ways.

The ideal of material conquest that is associated with physical well-being and "prosperity" has determined the transformations and the perversions that America represents.

It has been correctly pointed out that:

In its race toward richness and power, America has abandoned the axis of freedom in order to follow that of productivity....All the energies, including those related to the ideals and to religion, lead toward the same productive purpose: we are in the presence of a productive society, almost a theocracy of productivity, which is increasingly aiming at producing things rather than people, or people only as more efficient workers ...

In the U.S., some kind of mysticism surrounds the supreme rights of the community. The human being, having become a means rather than an end in itself, accepts the role of "cog-in-the machine" without thinking for a second that in the process he may be somewhat belittled. Hence, a collectivism which is willed by the elites and a critically accepted by the masses, surreptitiously undermines man's autonomy and strictly channels his actions, thus confirming his very abdication without him realizing it....No protests and no reaction of the great American masses ever ensued against the collective tyranny. They accept it freely, as a natural thing, and almost as if it were expedient.

On this basis the same themes emerge, in the sense that even in the more general domain of culture there is a necessary and spontaneous correspondence with the principles that shape the Soviet world.

And therefore, although America is far from banning the culture of intellectuality, it certainly nurtures an instinctive indifference toward it, and to the degree that intellectuality does not become an instrument of something practical, it is almost as if it were a luxury that those who are intent upon serious things (such as "getting rich fast," "volunteer work," and sundry campaigns and lobbies to promote various social issues) should not indulge in. Generally speaking, in the USA, while men work, women get involved in "spiritual issues"; hence the strong percentage of women in countless sects and societies in which spiritualism, psychoanalysis, and counterfeits of

Eastern doctrines are mixed with humanitarianism, feminism, and sentimentalism, as well as with social versions of puritanism and scientism—all things that truly reflect the American understanding of "spirituality." And when we see America acquire with its dollars some representatives and works of ancient European culture for the benefit and the enjoyment of the upper crust of the Third Estate, the true center lies elsewhere. In America any inventor who discovers some new tool that will improve production will always win more social approval and acknowledgment than the traditional type of the intellectual; moreover, anything that is profit, reality, or action in the material sense of the word will always be valued more than anything that may derive from a line of aristocratic dignity. Thus, even though America has not officially banished ancient philosophy like communism did, it has done something better; through a William James it has declared that the useful is the criterion of truth and that the value of any concept, even metaphysical ones, should be measured by its practical efficiency, which in the context of the American mentality always ends up meaning "socioeconomic efficiency." So-called pragmatism is one of the more typical features of the entire American civilization; among others are Dewey's theories and so-called behaviorism, this last being the exact reflection of theories developed from Pavlov's studies concerning conditioned reflexes; it totally excludes the existence of an "I" and of a substantial principle called "consciousness." The consequence of this typically "democratic" theory is that anybody can become anything they wish to be, provided a certain amount of training and pedagogy be supplied; in other words man, in himself, is believed to be a shapeless and moldable substance, just like communism wants him to be when it regards as antirevolutionary and anti-Marxist the genetic theory of innate qualities elaborated in the field of biology. The power that advertising enjoys in the USA can be explained by the inner inconsistency and passivity of the American soul, which in many respects displays the two-dimensional characteristics of puberty rather than youth.

Soviet communism officially professes atheism. America does not go that far, and yet without realizing it, and often believing the contrary, it is running down a path in which nothing is left of what in the context of Catholicism had a religious meaning. I have previously discussed what religiosity is reduced to in Protestantism; once every principle of authority and hierarchy has been rejected and religiosity has rid itself of metaphysical interest, dogmas, rituals, symbols, and sacraments, it has thereby been reduced to mere moralism, which in puritan Anglo-Saxon countries, and especially in America, is employed in the service of a conformist collectivity.

Siegfried has correctly pointed out that "the only true American religion is Calvinism, understood as the view according to which the true cell of the social organism is not the individual, but the community," in which wealth is regarded, in one's mind as well as in others', as a sign of divine election. Thus, "it becomes difficult to distinguish between religious aspiration and the pursuit of wealth...It is regarded as a moral and even as a desirable thing for the religious spirit to become a factor of social progress and of economic development." Consequently, the traditional virtues that are required to achieve any supernatural goal eventually come to be regarded as useless and even harmful. In the eyes of a typical American, the ascetic is regarded as one who wastes time, when he is not looked down upon as a social parasite; the hero,

in the ancient sense, is regarded as some kind of fanatic or lunatic to be neutralized through pacifism and humanitarianism, while the fanatical puritan moralist is himself surrounded by a bright aura.

Is all this that far off from Lenin's recommendation to ostracize "every view that is supernatural or extraneous to class interests" and wipe out as an infectious disease any residue of independent spirituality? Does not the technocratic ideology arise both in America and in Russia from the ranks of secularized and all-powerful men?

Let us reflect on the following point. Through the New Economic Policy (NEP) in Russia private capitalism was abolished only to be replaced with state capitalism; the latter consisted of a centralized capitalism without any visible capitalists and it engaged in a mastodonic yet hopeless enterprise. In theory, every Soviet citizen was both a worker and an investor in the all-inclusive socialist state. For practical purposes he was an investor who never received dividends; aside from what he was given to make a living, the fruit of his work went to the party, which in turn invested it in other companies and industries without allowing it to stop circulating and to end up in anybody's pocket. The result was the ever greater power of collective man, though not without a specific relation to the plans of global revolution and subversion. Let us recall what has been said about the role that asceticism plays in capitalism (a typically American phenomenon) and about wealth, which in America instead of being the goal of one's work and the means to display a greatness that transcends mere economic fortunes, becomes the means to generate more work, new profits, and so on in an endless and uninterrupted chain. Once we keep this in mind, we will see that in America, what asserts itself here and there in a spontaneous way and in the context of "freedom," is the same style that the centralized structures of the communist state try to realize in a violent way. Moreover, in the appalling size of the American metropolis, in which the individual (the "nomad of the asphalt") realizes his nothingness before the immense reign of quantity, before the groups, trusts, and omnipotent standards, before the jungle of skyscrapers and factories, while the dominators are chained to the very things they dominate — in all this the collective dimension is increasingly revealed in a greater form of anonymity than in the tyranny exercised by the Soviet system over its primitive and abolic subjects.

The intellectual standardization, conformism, and mandatory normalization that is organized on a grand scale are typically American phenomena, though they happen to coincide with the Soviet ideal of the "official view of the state" that is to be imposed on the collectivity. It has rightly been observed that every American (whether he be named Wilson or Roosevelt, Bryan or Rockefeller) is an evangelist who cannot leave his fellow men alone, who constantly feels the need to preach and work for the conversion, purification, and elevation of each and everyone to the standard moral level of America, which he believes to be superior and higher than all others. This attitude originated with abolitionism during the Civil War and culminated with the double democratic "crusade" in Europe envisioned by Wilson and by Roosevelt. And yet even in minor matters, whether it be prohibitionism or the feminist, pacifist, or environmental propaganda, we always

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find the same spirit, the same leveling and standardizing will and the petulant intrusion of the collective and the social dimension in the individual sphere. Nothing is further from the truth than the claim that the American soul is "open-minded" and unbiased; on the contrary, it is ridden with countless taboos of which people are sometimes not even aware.

I have said before that one of the reasons why the Bolshevik ideology took a liking to America is due to the fact that it fully realized how, in the latter's type of civilization, technology contributes to the idea of depersonalization. The moral standard corresponds to the American's practical standard. The comforts available to everyone and the superproduction of consumerist civilization that characterize the USA have been purchased with the enslavement of millions of people to the automatism of work, as if in their work they have been formed by an extreme level of specialization that narrows the mental field of action and dulls every sensibility. Instead of the type of the artisan, for whom every job was an art and whose production carried the imprint of personality (since it presupposed a personal, direct, and qualitative knowledge of that particular trade), we have today a herd of pariah who dumbly witness the work of machines, the secrets of which are known only to the person in charge of repairing them. Stalin and Ford can be said to meet here, and thus a vicious circle is established; the standardization inherent in every mechanical and quantitative product determines and imposes the standardization on those who purchase them; the uniformity of tastes and progressive reduction to a few types corresponds to what is directly manifested in people's minds. In America everything works toward this goal; conformism in terms of "matter of fact" and "like-mindedness" is the password on all planes of existence. Thus, when the dams are not broken by the phenomenon of organized crime and by other uncontrolled forms of "supercompensation" (I have previously mentioned the "beat generation"), the American soul is protected from any transcendent vocation by its optimistic, sports-minded, and simplistic view of the world.

Thus, the great majority of Americans could be said to represent a refutation on a large scale of the Cartesian principle, "Cogito ergo sum"; they "do not think and are." Better yet, in many cases they are dangerous individuals and in several instances their primitivism goes way beyond the Slavic primitivism of "homo sovieticus."

Obviously, the leveling process applies to the sexes as well. The Soviet emancipation of the woman parallels that emancipation that in America the feminist idiocy, deriving from "democracy" all its logical conclusions, had achieved a long time ago in conjunction with the materialistic and practical degradation of man. Through countless and repeated divorces the disintegration of the family in America is characterized by the same pace that we could expect in a society that knows only "comrades." The women, having given up their true nature, believe they can elevate themselves by taking on and practicing all kinds of traditionally masculine activities. These women are chaste in their immorality and banal even in their lowest perversions; quite often they find in alcohol the way to rid themselves of the repressed or deviated energies of their own nature.

Moreover, young women seem to know very little of the polarity and the elemental magnetism of

sex as they indulge in a comradely and sportive promiscuity. These phenomena are typically American, even though their contagious diffusion all over the world makes it difficult for people to trace their origin to America. Actually, if there is a difference between this promiscuity and that envisioned by communism, it is resolved in a pejorative sense by a gynaecocratic factor, since every woman and young girl in America and other Anglo-Saxon countries considers it only natural that some kind of preeminence and existential respectability be bestowed upon her as if it were her inalienable right.

In the early days of Bolshevism somebody formulated the ideal of a cacophonous, collectivist music that was meant to purify music itself of its sentimental bourgeois content. This is what America has realized on a large scale and spread all over the world through a very significant phenomenon: jazz.

In the ballrooms of American cities where hundreds of couples shake like epileptic and automatic puppets to the sounds of black music, what is awakened is truly a "mass state" and the life of a mechanized collective entity. Very few phenomena are so indicative of the general structure of the modern world in its last phase as this, since what characterizes it is the coexistence of a mechanical, inanimate element consisting in movement of a primitivist and subpersonal type that transports man into a climate of turbid sensations ("a petrified forest wrecked by chaos," said H. Miller). Moreover, what in Bolshevism was programmed and occasionally realized in theatrical representations of the awakening of the proletarian world in view of a systematic activation of the masses, in America found its equivalent long ago but on a larger scale and in a spontaneous form; I am referring to the senseless delirium of sporting events, which are based on a plebeian and materialistic degradation of the cult of action.

These frenzies represent the phenomena of the incursion of the collective and the regression into the collective.

Walt Whitman, the American poet and mystic of democracy, may be regarded as the forerunner of that "collective poetry" that urges one to action, which is one of the communist ideals and programs. A similar kind of lyricism permeates several aspects of the American life: sports, ceaseless activity, productivity, and volunteer work. Just as in the case of the USSR we can only wait for adequate developments to resolve the primitivist and chaotic residues of the Slavic soul, likewise, in America one can logically expect the individualistic residues of the spirit of the cowboys, pioneers, and what is still to transpire from the deeds of gangsters and anarchical existentialists to be eventually reduced and taken up in the mainstream.

If this was the proper context, it would be easy to produce more evidence concerning the similarities between the two countries that would allow us to see in communist Russia and in America two faces of the same coin, or two movements whose destructive paths converge. The former is a reality unfolding under the iron fist of a dictatorship and through a radical nationalization and rationalization. The latter is a spontaneous realization (and therefore more

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worrisome) of a mankind that accepts and even wants to be what it is, that feels healthy, free, and strong and that implements the same tendencies as communism but without the fanatical and fatalistic dedication of the communist Slav. And yet, behind both "civilizations" those who have eyes to see can detect the warning signs of the advent of the "Nameless Beast." Despite all, there are some who still believe that American "democracy" is the antidote for Soviet communism and the only alternative for the so-called free world. Generally speaking, a danger is clearly recognized in the presence of a brutal, physical attack from the outside but not one coming from the inside. For quite some time Europe has been under the influence of America and therefore has undergone the perversion of traditional values arid ideals inherent in the North American world. This has happened as some sort of fatal reaction.

America represents a "Far West," and it contains the further and radical development of the basic trends that have been adopted by modern Western civilization. Thus, it is not possible to put up a valid resistance to the modern world while still holding on to the principles and especially to the technological and productive mirage on which this world is based. With the development of this accelerating influence, chances are that the closing of the pincers from East and West around a Europe, which following World War II, has no new ideas to offer and that ceased to enjoy the rank of an autonomous and hegemonic world power even in the political arena, will not even be perceived with a sense of capitulation. The final collapse will not even have the character of a tragedy.

The communist world and America, in their being persuaded of having a universal mission to accomplish, represent a reality to be reckoned with. An eventual conflict between them will be, on the plane of world subversion, the last of the violent operations and will require the beastly holocaust of millions of human lives; and so, the last phase of the involution and shift of power through all four traditional castes and the advent of a collectivized humanity will eventually be achieved. And even if the feared catastrophe of a nuclear holocaust is averted, this civilization of titans, iron, crystal, and cement metropolises, of swarming masses, statistics, and technology that keeps the forces of matter at the leash will appear as a world that wobbles in its orbit; one day it will wrest itself free and lose itself in a space in which there is no light other than the sinister glow cast by the acceleration of its own fall.

Youth, Beats and Right-Wing Anarchists

Much, all too much, has been written on the issue of the new generation, and 'youth'. In most respects, the question does not merit the interest it has received, and the importance sometimes granted today to youth in general, associated with a sort of devaluation of all who are not 'young', is absurd. There can be no doubt that we are living in an age of dissolution : so much so that people approximate to the condition of the "rootless", for whom 'society' no longer makes any sense, and nor do the norms that used to regulate life – laws of the age immediately receding our own, that still persists in various places, and which represent merely the morals of the bourgeoisie. Naturally, this situation has been felt especially strongly by the young, and raising

certain issues in this regard can be legitimate. However, the type of response that is limited to simply suffering from all of this, unable to free oneself by virtue of any active initiative of one's own, as might have been possible for the few intellectual individualist rebels of the previous century, has to be isolated and considered first and primarily.

If this is all, then the new generation is merely subjected to the state of things ; it raises no real issue, and makes a thoroughly stupid use of the 'liberty' at its disposal. When this type of youth pretends that it is misunderstood, the only answer one can give it is that there is simply nothing to understand about it, and that, under a normal order, it would only be a matter of putting such youth back where it belongs without delay, as is done with children when their stupidity becomes tiresome, invasive and impertinent. The so-called anti-conformism of some of their attitudes, which in other respects are quite banal, follows in addition a sort of trend, a new convention, such that the result is exactly the opposite of a manifestation of liberty. Other phenomena that we have considered in the preceding pages, such as the taste for vulgarity and some novel forms of manners, one may, on the whole, regard as characteristic of this type of youth ; some provide the fans of both sexes for prize-fighters, or for the epileptic 'singers' of the moment, or for the collective sessions of puppets represented by the 'yeah-yeah' sessions, or for such-and-such a 'hit record', and so on, with the corresponding behavior. The absence among them of any sense of the ridiculous makes it impossible to exert any influence upon them, so really one should leave them to themselves, and to their own stupidity, and consider that, if by some chance, some polemics regarding, for example, the sexual emancipation of minors, or the sense of family, appear among this type of youth, these polemics will necessarily possess no substance. As the years pass, the necessity, for the majority among them, of facing the material and economic problems of life, will no doubt ensure that such youths, having become adult, will adapt to the professional, productive and social routines of a world such as the actual one ; in fact, this type of youth thereby passes from one form of nothingness to another form of nothingness. No problem worthy the name is raised by any of this.

This type of "youth", defined by age alone (for, in this context, it would be out of the question to speak of certain possibilities characteristic of youth in the inner, spiritual sense) is heavily established in Italy. Federal Germany presents a very different case : the stupid and decomposed forms of which we have already spoken are much less prevalent there ; the new generation seems to have calmly accepted the fact of an existence in which no problems should be raised, of a life in which neither purpose nor good should be sought ; they think only of using the resources and facilities that the recent development of Germany has acquired. We may refer to this type of youth as being 'without concerns', and it has gradually left many conventions behind, and acquired new liberties, without strife, but all within a two-dimensional realm of 'factuality', for which any higher interest, in myths, in a discipline, in an *idée-force*, is unknown.

For Germany, this is most likely a transitional phase, because we turn our attention to nations that have gone further in that same direction, where the ideal of the "welfare state" is nearly achieved, where existence is taken for granted, where all is rationally regimented – we may in

particular refer to Denmark, to Sweden, and, in part, to Norway – eventually, intermittently, reactions in the form of violent and unexpected eruptions take place. These are stirred up mainly by youth. This phenomenon is already interesting, and it might be worth examining (1).

But in order to study its most typical forms one should concentrate on America, and, to some extent, England. In America, phenomena of spiritual trauma and revolt by the new generation have already emerged very clearly, on a large scale. We refer to the generation that acquired the name ‘beat generation’, and about which we have already spoken in the preceding pages : ‘beats’, or ‘beatniks’, or even ‘hipsters’, to quote another variation. They have been the representatives of a sort of anarchistic and anti-social existentialism, of a more practical than intellectual character (leaving aside certain literary manifestations, of the lowest order). At the moment we write these lines, the movement’s golden, thriving period has already passed ; it has practically disappeared from the scene, or has dissolved. Nonetheless, it retains a unique significance, because this phenomenon is intrinsically linked to the very nature of the present civilisation ; so long as this civilisation persists, it is to be expected that similar manifestations will appear, albeit under varying forms and denominations. More particularly, American society, representing, more than any other society, the limit and the *reductio ad absurdum* of the entire contemporary system, the ‘beat’ forms of the phenomenon of revolt have gained a special, paradigmatic character, and, therefore, should not be considered as belonging to the same level as that stupid youth, of which we have already spoken when considering the case of Italy, in particular (2).

From our point of view, a brief study of these phenomena is justified, because we share the opinion, expressed by a number of ‘beats’ : namely – and in opposition to what psychiatrists, psycho-analysts and ‘social workers’ think – in a society, a civilisation, like ours, and, especially, like that of the USA – one must in general admit that the rebel, the being who does not adapt, the a-social being, is in fact the sanest man. In an abnormal world, values are inverted : whosoever appears abnormal, in relation to the existing milieu, is most probably precisely the ‘normal’ person, in the sense that in him there still subsist traces of integral vital energy ; and we do not follow those who want to ‘rehabilitate’ such individuals, whom they consider to be sick, and ‘save’ them for ‘society’. One psychoanalyst, Robert Linder, had the courage to admit that. From our point of view, the only problem concerns the definition of what we might call the ‘right-wing anarchist’. We will examine the distance that separates this type from the problematic orientation that nearly always characterises the ‘non-conformism’ of ‘beats’ and ‘hipsters’ (3).

The starting point, that is to say, the condition that determines the revolt of the ‘beat’, is evident. A system is accused, despite the fact that it does not employ ‘totalitarian’ political forms, of strangling life, attacking personality. Sometimes the issue of physical insecurity in the future is brought up, in the form of the view that the very existence of human kind is put in question by the probability of an eventual nuclear war (blown up to apocalyptic proportions) ; but what is chiefly felt is the danger of spiritual death, inherent in the adaptation to the current system and to its externally imposed conditioning forces (its ‘heteroconditioning’). America is described as “a

country rotten with a cancer that proliferates in every one of its cells" and it is claimed that "passivity (conformity), anxiety, and boredom are its three characteristics." In such a climate, the condition of the rootless being, the unit lost in the "lonely crowd," is very vividly experienced ; "society, empty voices, meaninglessness." The traditional values have been lost, the new myths are debunked, and this "demythologisation" undermines all new hope : "liberty, social revolution, peace – nothing but hypocritical lies." "The alienation of the Self as ordinary condition" – such is the menace.

However, one can already note here the most important difference from the 'right-wing anarchist' type : the 'beat' does not react or rebel by starting from the positive – that is to say, by having a precise idea of what a normal and sane order would be, and firmly basing himself in certain fundamental values. He reacts instinctively, in a confused, existential way, against the prevailing situation, in a manner similar to what occurs in certain forms of biological reaction. On the other hand, the 'right-wing anarchist' knows what he wants, he has a basis for saying 'no'. The 'beat', in his chaotic revolt, not only lacks such a basis, but would probably reject it, too, were it to be indicated. That is why the phrases, 'rebel without a flag', or 'rebel without a cause', could actually appeal to him. This implies a fundamental weakness, in that the 'beat' and the 'hipster', despite their fear of being 'heteroconditioned', that is to say, subjected to externally imposed conditioning forces, actually run precisely that danger, because their attitudes are motivated by, in the sense of being mere reactions to, the existing situation. Accepting everything, impassability, cold detachment, would be a more consistent attitude.

Therefore, when the 'beat', beyond his outwardly directed protest and revolt, considers the actual problem of his inner personal life, and seeks to resolve it, he inevitably finds himself on slippery ground. Lacking a concrete inner centre, he throws himself into the pursuit of thrills, obeying impulses that make him regress rather than develop, as he seeks all possible ways to fill the vacuum and obscure the nonsensicality of life. One precursor of the 'beats', Henry Thoreau, took up Rousseau's myth of the natural man, of flight into nature, to propound a solution that is illusory ; a formula that is all too simple, and essentially insipid. Yet there are those who followed this path, towards a neo-primitive, bohemian lifestyle, nomadism, and vagabondism (such as Kerouac's characters) ; who sought disorder, and the unforeseeable character of an existence that abhors every pre-ordained line of action, and all discipline, in favour of an attempt to seize at every moment the fullness of life and existence (one could refer to Henry Miller's more or less autobiographical early novels : "burning consciousness of the present, with neither a 'good' nor an 'evil'").

The situation is further aggravated by resort to extreme solutions : that is to say, one seeks to fill the inner vacuum and to feel 'real', one seeks to prove oneself worthy of a superior liberty ("the I, without law and without obligation"), by means of violent and criminal actions, which are then given the sense of an affirmation of oneself, as opposed to merely the sense of acts of extreme resistance and protest against the established order, against what is normal and rational. Thus one generates a 'moral' basis for unrestrained criminality, without material or passionate motives,

driven solely by a “desperate need for value”, because one has “to prove to oneself that one is a man”, that “one is not afraid of oneself”, by “dicing with death and the beyond.” The use of everything frenetic, irrational and violent – the “frenetic violence to create or destroy” – can come into play.

Here, the illusory and equivocal character of solutions of this kind emerges quite clearly. It is obvious, in essence, that in such cases the search for intensified vital sensation serves nearly always as an illusory substitute for a real sense of Self. In discussing extreme and irrational acts, we will, in addition, show that this is not only, for instance, a matter of going out into the street and shooting passers-by at random (as André Breton proposed once to the ‘surrealists’), or of raping one’s young sister, but also, perhaps, giving away, or destroying, everything one owns, or risking one’s life to save a stupid stranger. One must therefore be able to discern whether what one sees as a ‘gratuitous’ extreme act is not perhaps directed by hidden impulses, whose slave one is, rather than by something attesting to, and realising, a superior liberty. In general, there is considerable ambivalence within the anarchist individualist : “to be oneself, free from bonds” even while remaining slave to oneself. Herbert Gold’s observation of such cases, lacking in self-examination, is doubtless right : “The hipster is a victim of the worst form of slavery, the slave who, unconscious and proud of his condition of servitude, calls it freedom.”

There is more to this. Many intense experiences that could give the ‘beat’ a fleeting sensation of ‘reality’ make him in essence even less ‘real’, because they condition him. Wilson brings this situation very clearly into light, by means of a character in his previously mentioned book. This character executes, in a rather ‘beat’ setting, a series of sadistic assassinations of women, in order to feel himself ‘reintegrated’, to escape frustration, “because he has been frustrated in his pursuit of his right to be a god”, and ends up revealing oneself as a broken and unreal being. “Like a paralytic who always needs stronger stimulants and for whom nothing matters … I thought murder was but an expression of revolt against the modern world and its ambushes, because the more one speaks of order and society, the higher the crime rate rises. I thought his crimes were but an act of defiance … that was far from being the case – he kills for the same reason that drives an alcohol to drink : because he cannot do without it.” The same applies, naturally, to other extreme experiences.

We may, in passing, recall, so as to again establish precise distinctions, that the world of Tradition was also familiar with the ‘Left-Hand Path’ – a path of which we have spoken elsewhere (4), that includes breaking the law, destruction, and orgiastic experience of various forms, but starting from a positive, sacred and ‘sacrificial’ orientation, “towards what is above”, towards transcendence of all limitation. This is the opposite of searching for violent sensations merely because one is internally beaten and inconsistent, merely in order to prolong the sense of existence in one way or another. This is why the title of Wilson’s book, ‘Ritual in the Dark’, is very appropriate : it describes a mode of celebration, within a realm of shadow, without light, what could have had the sense, in a different context, of a rite of transfiguration.

In the same way, the ‘beats’ have often made use of certain drugs, seeking thereby to induce a rupture, an opening, beyond ordinary consciousness. And that, with the best intentions. However, one of the movement’s main representatives, Norman Mailer, has come to recognise the ‘dice game’ implied in the use of drugs. Aside from the ‘superior lucidity’, from the ‘new, fresh and original perception of reality, now unknown to common man’, to which some aspire by the use of drugs, there is the danger of ‘artificial paradises’, of surrendering to forms of ecstatic voluptuousness, intense sensation, and even visions, devoid of any spiritual or revealing content, and followed by depression once one returns to normality, which only aggravates the existential crisis. The determining factor here is the underlying attitude assumed by one’s being itself : this nearly always decides the effect of such drugs, in one sense or another. In attestation of that, one might refer, for instance, to the effects of mescaline, as described by Aldous Huxley (an author already acquainted with traditional metaphysics), who felt able to draw an analogy with certain experiences of high mysticism, as opposed to the totally banal effects described by Zaehner (the author whom we have already cited in our criticism of Cuttat), who wanted to repeat Huxley’s experiences, with the aim of “controlling” them, but starting from a completely different personal equation and attitude. However, given that the ‘beat’ is a profoundly traumatised being, who has thrown himself into a confused search for ‘kicks’, one must not expect anything much positive from the use of drugs. The other alternative will almost certainly prevail, thus reversing the initial apparent gains (5). Moreover, the problem is not resolved by sporadic escapist openings into ‘Reality’, following which one finds oneself plunged back into a life deprived of meaning. That the essential premises for venturing on this ground are inexistent is obvious from the fact that ‘beats’ and ‘hipsters’ were for the largest part youngsters, lacking the necessary maturity and avoiding all self-discipline on principle.

Some people have claimed that what the ‘beats’, or at least some of them, have obscurely sought, is in essence a new religion. Mailer, who said : “I want God to reveal me his face,” radically affirmed that they are the harbingers of a new religion, that their excesses and revolts are transitional forms, that “could give birth tomorrow to a new religion, like Christianity.” All this sounds like empty talk and, today, now that an assessment can be made, there are no such results to be seen. It is quite clear that what these forces lack are precisely superior and transcendent points of reference, similar to those of religions, able to provide a support and a right orientation. “They quest for a creed that saves them”, as someone said, but “God is under threat of death” (Mailer, referring to the God of Western theistic religion). This is why the one who was called the ‘mystic beat’ looked elsewhere, became attracted to oriental metaphysics, and especially in Zen, as we have already mentioned in another chapter. However, regarding this last point, there are grounds to question the motivations involved. Zen exerted an influence on the individuals in question, especially, because of the illuminatory, sudden, free openings into Reality (through satori), which the explosion and rejection of all rational superstructures, pure irrationality, the ruthless demolition of every idol, and the eventual use of violent means, could produce. One can understand that all this would greatly attract the young, rootless Westerner, who cannot tolerate any discipline, who lives adventurously, and who is in a state of rebellion. But the reality is that

Zen tacitly presupposes a previous orientation, linked to a secular tradition, and very difficult trials are not excluded. It may suffice to read the biography of certain Zen masters : Suzuki, who was the first to introduce these doctrines in the West, has literally spoken of a “baptism of fire” as preparation to satori. Arthur Rimbaud expounded a method of becoming a seer, through “the systematic derangement of the senses”, and we do not rule out the possibility that, in an absolutely, mortally, adventurous life, even without a guide, proceeding alone, ‘openings’ of the sort alluded to by Zen could happen. But these would always be exceptions, that, in fact, embody a certain miraculous character, as if one were predestined, or under the protection of a good daemon. One may suspect that the reason behind the attraction that Zen and similar doctrines are able to exert on ‘beats’ is this : the ‘beats’ suppose that these doctrines give a sort of spiritual justification to their disposition towards a purely negative anarchy, towards pure disorder, allowing them to elude the initial task, which, in their case, comes down to giving oneself an internal form. That confused need for a higher, supra-rational point of reference, and, as someone already said, a means of seizing “the secret call of being”, is also completely deviant, when that ‘being’ is confused with ‘Life’, following theories such as those of Jung and Reich, and when one sees in the sexual orgasm, and in the surrender to the sort of degenerate and paroxysmic Dionysianism sometimes offered by Negro jazz, other suitable paths for ‘feeling real’, for coming in contact with Reality (6).

With regard to sex, we repeat what we have already said above, in chapter XII, when examining the perspectives of the harbingers of the ‘sexual revolution’. One of the characters in Wilson’s already cited novel wonders whether “the felt need for a woman is not merely the need in us for that intensity”, whether a higher impulse, towards a supreme liberty, is not obscurely manifested in the sexual impulse. This question could be legitimate. We have already recalled that the non-biological and non-sensational, but, in a sense, transcendent conception of sexuality, has, in fact, precise and non-extravagant antecedents in traditional teachings. However, we need to refer to the discussion we have already presented on this subject in ‘The Metaphysics of Sex’, where we highlighted the ambivalence of the sexual experience, that is to say, the either positive or negative ‘derealising’ and de-conditioning possibilities that it contains. Nonetheless, when the starting point is a sort of existential anguish, to the point where the ‘beat’ appears obsessed with his incapacity to attain ‘the perfect orgasm’ (as described in the aforementioned views by Wilhelm Reich, and, partly, by D.H. Lawrence, who claimed to see in sex a means to integrate oneself in the primordial energy of life, taken for Being or the spirit) – in such cases, there are grounds for thinking that the negative and dissolutionary contents of the sexual experience will predominate, also because the preliminary existential conditions required for the opposite to be true are nonexistent : sex and the over-flowing force of the orgasm will possess the I, and not vice versa, as should be the case if all this was to serve as a path. Likewise for drugs : a wasted young generation cannot deal with experiences of this kind (which are also considered, incidentally, by the Left-Hand Path). As for full sexual liberty, as simple revolt and non-conformity, it is dull, and has nothing to do with the spiritual problem.

The negativity becomes more pronounced when ‘beats’ make of jazz a sort of religion, and see in it positive means to surmount their ‘alienation’, to seize moments of liberating intensity. The Negro origins of jazz (which do not cease to provide the basis for even the most elaborate forms of these rhythms, in the framework of ‘swing’ and ‘be-bop’ sessions), instead of serving as grounds for caution, are valorised. In an earlier chapter, we have already discussed, as an aspect of the spiritual ‘negrification’ of America, the fact that Mailer, in a famous essay, was able to assimilate the position of the ‘beat’ to that of the Negro, and to speak of the former as a ‘white negro’, and thus to admire certain aspects of the irrational, instinctive and violent Negro nature. Moreover, there has been among ‘beats’ an open tendency to promiscuity, including, on the sexual level, young white girls who have challenged ‘prejudices’ and conventions by giving themselves to Negroes. As for Jazz, one can identify in these circles a more serious appreciation than the mania of that stupid non-American youth mentioned at the beginning of this chapter ; but it is precisely for this reason that the matter is so much more dangerous : there are grounds for thinking that, by means of identification with frenetic and elemental rhythms, forms of ‘downward auto-transcendence’ (to use this previously explained expression) are induced, forms of sub-personal regression, into what is purely vital and primitive, partial possessions, that, following moments of paroxysmic intensity and outbursts of semi-ecstatic openness, leave one even more empty and unreal. If we consider the atmosphere of Negro rites, and of the collective ceremonies that jazz in its origins and earliest forms represents, that direction seems quite evident, because it is obvious that we are dealing, just as in the macumba and in the candomble practised by Black Americans, with forms of demonism and trance, with obscure possession, far removed from any openness to a superior world.

Unfortunately, there is little more to extract from an analysis of what the ‘beats’ and ‘hipsters’ ‘have sought, on an individual and existential plane, as a counterpart to a legitimate revolt against the present system, to fill the vacuum, and resolve the spiritual problem. The situation of crisis continues. In exceptional cases only, one may find something of positive value in the case of a ‘right- wing anarchist’. To be sure, the problem is a problem of human material. As regards practical non-conformism, demythologisation, cold dissociation vis-à-vis all bourgeois institutions : there can be no objection, if such a course is seriously followed by the new generation. Following the wish of some representatives of the ‘beat’ generation, we have not dismissed their movement as a passing trend. We have only considered it in its typical aspects ; its characteristic problem is a natural expression of the current epoch. Its significance remains, even though its forms have actually ceased to exist in America, or to exhibit any particular allure to the youth.

We would now like to consider the concerns of young generation a little more specifically. There are youths who revolt against the socio-political situation in Italy, and who are at the same time interested in what we call, in general, the world of Tradition. While, on the one hand, they oppose the leftist forces and ideologies that dangerously encroach on the practical plane, on the other hand, they look towards spiritual horizons, and take some interest in the teachings and

disciplines of ancient wisdom, if so far only theoretically, then still in more practical terms than the confused approaches of the ‘mystic beat’. We thus have forces that are potentially ‘on guard’. The problem is to come up with directions that are able to give a positive orientation to their activity.

Our book ‘Ride the Tiger’, considered by some as a ‘manual for the right-wing anarchist’, resolves the problem up to a certain point, insofar as it deals essentially – a thing that has not been stressed enough – only with a quite specific differentiated type of man, with a high level of maturity. Consequently, the orientations that are offered in that book are not always adapted, or, generally speaking, realisable, for the category of youth to which we have just alluded.

The first thing to recommend to those youths is prudence regarding all forms of interest or enthusiasm that might be of merely biological origin, that is to say, due to their age. It remains to be seen whether their attitude will remain unchanged with the coming of adulthood, when they will have to solve the concrete problems of existence. Unfortunately, our personal experience has shown us that this is rarely the case. By the turn of, let us say, their thirties, only a few maintain the same positions.

We have already spoken of a youth that is not only biological, but that also has an internal, spiritual aspect, necessarily not conditioned by age. That superior youth can however manifest itself in the other youth. We will not say that it is characterised by ‘idealism’, because the term is worn-out and ambiguous, and because the capacity to ‘demythologise’ ideals, by nearing the ground level of conventional values, is a quality that these youths share with other currents of an ultimately quite different orientation. We would rather speak of a certain capacity for enthusiasm and élan, unconditional devotion, and detachment from bourgeois existence and from purely material and selfish interests. However, the first task is to assimilate those dispositions that, among the best, thrive in parallel to physical youth, to make of them permanent qualities, resisting all the opposing influences to which one is fatally exposed with age (7). As regards non-conformism, the first thing required is a lifestyle that is strictly anti-bourgeois. In his first period, Ernst Jünger was not afraid to write : “Better be a delinquent than a bourgeois”; we are not saying that this formula should be taken to the letter, but it indicates a general orientation. In daily life one must also be careful of traps presented by sentimental affairs such as marriage, family, and everything belonging to the residual structures of a visibly absurd society. That is a fundamental point. On the other hand, for the type in question, certain experiences, the whole problematic character of which we have seen in the case of ‘beats’ and ‘hipsters’, might not offer the same dangers.

To counterpose to the weight of self-discipline as such, such a youth has to develop a taste for self-discipline which is free-form, detached from every social or ‘pedagogic’ need. This is the problem of youth’s formation, in the most objective sense of the word. The difficulty is caused by the fact that all such formation presupposes, as a point of reference, certain values, while the rebellious youth rejects all the values, all the ‘morals’, of current society, and of bourgeois

society in particular.

However, here, a distinction has to be made. There are values that have a conformist character, and an entirely external, social justification – apart from certain ‘values’ that remain such because their original foundations are irrevocably lost. On the other hand, certain other values are offered merely as supports, to guarantee a being a true form and firmness. Courage, loyalty, straightforwardness, the disgust for lying, the inability to betray, the superiority to all petty egotism and to every inferior interest, can be counted among values that, in a sense, rise above ‘good’ as much as ‘evil’, and that stand on a non-‘moral’, ontological, plane : precisely because they provide the basis for a ‘self’, or reinforce it, against the condition presented by unstable, fugitive, amorphous nature. Here there is no imperative. The natural disposition of the individual alone must decide. To use an image, nature presents us with as many substances that have attained a complete crystallisation, as it does ones that are imperfect and incomplete crystals, mixed with flimsy gangue (the mineral or earthy substance associated with metallic ore – ed.). Of course, we will not call the former ‘good’ and the latter ‘bad’, in a moral sense. They are rather different degrees of ‘reality’. The same holds true for the human being. The problem of the formation of the youth, and his love for self-discipline, should be measured on that plane, beyond all the criteria and values of social morality. F. Thiess has justly written : “There is vulgarity, meanness, baseness, animality, perfidy, just as there is the stupid practice of virtue, bigotry, the conformist respect for the law. The former is worth as little as the latter.”

In general, every youth is characterised by a surplus of energies. The question of their use arises in a world like ours. In this respect, one could first consider the external, physical development aspect of the ‘formation’ process. We would do well not to recommend the practice of modern sports in their quasi-totality. Sport is in fact one of the typical factors of the brutalisation of the modern masses, and a vulgar character is nearly always associated with it. But certain particular physical activities could be admitted. One example is offered by high-altitude mountaineering, providing it can be restored to its original form, without the technical aids and the tendency towards sheer acrobatism that have deformed it and rendered it somewhat materialistic in recent times. Parachuting can also offer positive possibilities – in these two cases, the presence of the risk factor is a useful support for inner strengthening. As another example, one could mention Japanese martial arts, provided that there is the opportunity to learn them according to their original tradition, and not under the forms nowadays so widespread in the West – forms deprived of that spiritual counterpart, thanks to which the mastering of these activities could be tightly linked to subtle forms of internal and spiritual discipline. In recent times, certain student corporations of central Europe, the *Korpsstudenten* that practised *Mensur* – that is to say, cruel but non-fatal duels, following precise norms (with facial scarring for marks) – with the goal of developing courage, firmness, intrepidity, resistance to physical pain. While certain values of a superior ethics, of honour and of camaraderie were privileged, without avoiding certain eventual excesses, those corporations offered various possibilities. But the corresponding socio-cultural contexts having disappeared, anything of this sort today in Italy is unthinkable.

The overabundance of energies can also lead to various forms of ‘activism’ in the socio-political domain. In these cases, a serious examination is essential, in the first place to ensure that the eventual engagement with ideas opposed to the general climate is not just a way of wasting energy (all the more as, in different circumstances, even very different ideas could likewise serve the same goal) : that the starting point and the motor force are a true identification with these ideas, arrived at on the basis of thoughtful acknowledgement of their intrinsic value. That being said, in relation to any sort of activism, the difficulty is that, although the type of youth to which we refer may already have understood what ideas are worth fighting for, he could hardly find, in the current climate, any fronts, parties, or political groups truly and uncompromisingly defending ideas of that type. Another circumstance – namely, that, given the stage at which we currently are, the fight against the political and social movements that nowadays dominate has little chances of achieving appreciable global results – has little weight in the final analysis, because here the norm should be to do what must be done, while being ready to fight, eventually, even on lost positions. At any rate, to affirm today a ‘presence’ by action will always be useful.

As for anarchist activism of mere protest, this could range from certain violent manifestations labelled as ‘pertaining to the underground’, such as those of the youth of certain nations (we have already discussed the case of Northern European countries, where reigns the ‘welfare state’), to terrorist acts, such as those used by old-school, nihilistic, political anarchists. We must exclude the motives of certain ‘beats’, that is to say, the desire for some violent action just because one needs the sensation it brings – even in the context of a mere outlet of energies, such an activism seems unfounded. Surely, if there could be organised today a sort of active ‘Holy Vehm’, able to keep those mainly responsible for contemporary subversion in a status of continuous physical insecurity, that would be an excellent thing. But that is not something that the youth can organise, and, moreover, the defence system of the current society is too well-built for such initiatives not to be intercepted from the start, and paid for at a too-high price.

One final point has to be considered. In the category of the youths that we are presently discussing, who, in the context of the current world, can be defined as ‘right-wing anarchists’, we find some individuals on whom, simultaneously, the perspectives of spiritual realisation that have been presented by serious proponents of the traditionalist movement, with references to ancient sapiential and initiatic doctrines, exert an attraction. This is something more serious than the ambiguous interest exerted by the irrationalism of a misunderstood Zen among some American ‘beats’, if only because of the different quality of the sources of information. Such an attraction is understandable, if we consider the spiritual vacuum that has been created, following the decadence of the religious forms that have dominated in the West, and the questioning of their value. Distinct from these, it can be observed that there is an aspiration towards something really superior, and not to worthless substitutes. Nonetheless, when speaking of youth, we must not nourish aspirations too ambitious and removed from reality. It is not only necessary to have the required maturity ; what must also be taken into account is the fact that the path which we have indicated in the previous chapters (XI and XV) requires, and has always required, a

particular precondition, something similar to what is known as a ‘vocation’, in a specific sense, in religious orders. It is known that in these orders a certain amount of time is left to the novice so that he may verify the authenticity of his vocation. Here, we must repeat what we have said before about the more general vocation that one can sense as a youth : one has to see whether it strengthens rather than weakens with age.

The doctrines to which we refer must not be allowed to give birth to the illusions sponsored by the many impure forms of contemporary neo-spiritualism – theosophy, anthroposophy, etc. – that is to say, to the idea that the highest goal is within the reach of all, and realisable by this or that expedient ; it should rather appear like a distant watershed, to be reached only by a long, difficult and dangerous path. In spite of that, we could always indicate, to those who nurture a serious interest, certain preliminary and momentous tasks. In the first place, they could devote themselves to a series of studies regarding their general view of life and of the world, which is the natural counterpart of these doctrines, so as to acquire a new mental formation, that corroborates on a positive basis the ‘no’ they must pronounce to all that exists today, and to eliminate the various severe intoxications caused by modern culture. The second phase, the second task, would be to surpass the purely intellectual phase, by making ‘organic’ a certain set of ideas, that determine a fundamental existential orientation, and give thereby the sentiment of an unalterable, indestructible security. A youth that would gradually arrive at that level would have already gone a very long way. One could leave undetermined the ‘yes’ and the ‘when’ of the third phase, in which, while maintaining the original tension, certain ‘deconditioning’ acts could be assayed in respect of the human limit. In that connection, imponderable factors come into play, and the only reasonable thing to achieve is an adequate preparation. To expect any immediate results in a youth is absurd.

Various experiences have convinced us that these final brief considerations and clarifications are not unnecessary, even though they obviously concern a highly differentiated group within non-conformist youth : the group of those who have accurately perceived the specifically spiritual problem. We have thus gone well beyond what is commonly called ‘the problem of youth’. The ‘right-wing anarchist’ can be conceived as a sufficiently distinct and comprehensible type, as opposed to the stupid youth, the ‘rebels without a flag’, and those who offer themselves to adventure, and undertake experiences that provide no real solution, no positive contribution, since they do not already have an internal form. In all rigour, one could object that this form is a limitation, a form of bondage, and that it contradicts the initial claim, the absolute liberty of anarchism. But since it is quite unlikely that anyone who makes such an objection has in mind transcendence in the real and full sense of the word – the sense this term has, for example, in high ascesis – one need only answer that the other alternative concerns a ‘burned-out’ youth, so much so that, no solid centre having resisted the trial represented by the general dissolution, it may well be considered as a pure existential product of that same dissolution, such that this youth greatly deludes itself in thinking that it really is free. Such a youth, whether rebellious or not, draws little interest from us, and there is nothing to be done with it. It can only serve as a

case study within the general framework of an epoch's pathology.

Julius Evola

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